

Systems of Life

Biopolitics, Economics, and Literature
on the Cusp of Modernity

Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag, Editors



VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Systems of Life



forms of living

Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers, *series editors*

Systems of Life

**Biopolitics, Economics, and Literature
on the Cusp of Modernity**

Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag, Editors

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW YORK 2019

Copyright © 2019 Fordham University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Fordham University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Fordham University Press also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Visit us online at www.fordhampress.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Barney, Richard A., (date) editor. | Montag, Warren, editor.

Title: Systems of life : biopolitics, economics, and literature on the cusp of modernity / Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag, editors.

Description: First edition. | New York : Fordham University Press, 2019. | Series: Forms of living | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018020389 | ISBN 9780823281725 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780823281718 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Biopolitics—Europe—History. | Economics—Europe—Philosophy—History. | European literature—18th century. | European literature—19th century.

Classification: LCC JA80 .S97 2019 | DDC 320.01—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018020389>

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 5 4 3 2 1

First edition

CONTENTS

	Introduction: Systems of Life, or Bioeconomic Politics <i>Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag</i>	I
1.	Looking for (Economic) Growth in the Eighteenth Century <i>Christian Marouby</i>	35
2.	An African Diasporic Critique of Violence <i>James Edward Ford III</i>	56
3.	Rousseau: Vital Instinct and Pity <i>Pierre Macherey</i>	82
4.	System and Subject in Adam Smith's Political Economy: Nature, Vitalism, and Bioeconomic Life <i>Catherine Packham</i>	93
5.	Vitalism's Revolution: John Thelwall, Life, and the Economy of Radical Politics <i>Richard A. Barney</i>	114
6.	Writing Generation: Revolutionary Bodies and the Poetics of Political Economy <i>Annika Mann</i>	135
7.	William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny <i>Amanda Jo Goldstein</i>	162
8.	Concerning Hunger: Empire Aesthetics in the Present Moment <i>Mrinalini Chakravorty</i>	201
9.	The Hero Takes a Fall: Gravity, Comedy, and Darwin's Entangled Bank <i>Timothy C. Campbell</i>	236

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	255
<i>List of Contributors</i>	257
<i>Index</i>	261

Systems of Life

Systems of Life, or Bioeconomic Politics

Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag

The best way to learn any Science, is to begin with a regular System, or a short and plain Scheme of that Science, well drawn up into a narrow Compass.

—ISAAC WATTS, *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741)

That the fitness of any system or machine to produce the end for which it was intended, bestows a certain propriety and beauty upon the whole, and renders the very thought and contemplation of it agreeable, is so very obvious that nobody has overlooked it.

—ADAM SMITH, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)

In the eighteen years between Isaac Watts's and Adam Smith's remarks regarding the utility of systematic thinking at the middle of the eighteenth century, we find a conceptual arc—in miniature—that fits the broader development of European thinking about “system” from the early eighteenth century to the early nineteenth. Both authors stress the attractions of systematic efficiency and coherence, for instance, but whereas Watts focuses his appreciation on the relatively narrow compass of the epistemological benefits for knowledge formation (where “science” could designate any field of developed expertise), Smith expands system's importance to apply potentially to any kind of practical, social, or scientific enterprise whose “end” also incorporates a definitively aesthetic dimension of “fitness” or “beauty.” Not quite three decades after his brief consideration of the relevance of “system” to sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith would demonstrate all the more emphatically the significance of systematicity to an ambitious project articulating the complex relations of political economy in his *Wealth of*

Nations (1776), where the term *system* and its variants appear more than 165 times. Furthermore, not only was book 4 of that treatise devoted to “Systems of Political Oeconomy,” but Smith eventually identified versions of systems in fields that included agriculture, commerce, physics, ethics, administration, finance, taxation, and philosophy.

This collection of essays takes its cue from the ascendancy of system indicated by Smith’s work in order to articulate a framework in which to grasp the complex relations among biological knowledge, economics, and politics in Europe and its colonies from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth. In these terms, this volume aims to draw on recent scholarly accounts of the significance of *system* in Renaissance and Enlightenment contexts in order to reevaluate the importance of the systematic to biopolitical theory, which has paid particular attention to the importance of this historical period, especially in the case of analysts such as Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Roberto Esposito. Considered as a whole, the essays in this volume can therefore be taken as an argument that the concept of “system” can help specify all the more concretely the ways that the “bio” was articulated in relation to the “political” in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century biopolitics, with “economy” serving as a useful mediating term between them by offering a way to articulate their “order” as a matter of exchange, valuation, or management. Given Smith’s remark about the “beauty” of systems, moreover, it is no accident that several of the essays in this volume examine the relevance of aesthetic production—whether poetry, fiction, comedy, or visual art—to the deployment of economic values in relation to both biological and political spheres.¹

During the period in question, the term *economy* could have a range of relevant meanings: On the one hand, for instance, it could denote the specific domain of financial investment, capital transactions, and the sale of goods; on the other hand, it could pertain to a much broader notion of a calculable network of value, exchange, and circulation—the very qualities increasingly championed as part of the general usefulness of “system” by writers such as Smith. As several of the essays in this volume attest, it is precisely the malleability of the term *economy* that enabled biopolitical discourse to attach itself to the concrete elements of financial arrangement while also claiming for itself the kind of holistic cohesion characteristic of an economic system broadly conceived. Put another way, the logic of econ-

omy as a system of commerce enabled authors ranging from William Blake to Charles Darwin to link the operations of biological life to their larger sociopolitical implications, while the logic of economy as coherent system provided a rationale by which to imagine the biological, economic, and political spheres as intricately connected in an articulation of “life” writ large.

A brief glance at the history of the term *system* reveals that it too has contained multiple valences. Although the Greek term *sustēma* had been known since the time of Plato and was widely used in different contexts to denote groups, assemblages, and compositions both human and nonhuman, the term was rarely used in classical Latin. In postclassical Latin *systema* denoted an organized whole, and by the mid-sixteenth century it acquired a new set of meanings and applications. Michel-Pierre Lerner has meticulously demonstrated its importance: The concept of “system” became the notional cornerstone of the scientific and theological debates regarding Copernicus’s proposal for a heliocentric rather than geocentric model of what we now call the solar system. Although at first it served the purpose of supporting what seemed a far more coherent explanation for planetary movements, Lerner shows that the rhetoric of “system” had been adopted by all sides of the debate in an attempt to establish the most coherent and inclusive explanation. From this dialogical process emerged the key phrase “world system.”² For Walter Ong, who concurs regarding the importance of Copernicus’s new astronomical arguments, the notion of system would have far-reaching influence in the advent of what Ong calls “epistemological visualism,” which underscored a shift toward knowledge based on spatial, objectified terminology, and which, within the next two centuries, would be applied to other fields, including philosophy, medical science, and ethics.³

What is particularly germane here is that from these early modern roots, the term *system* registers a profound and ineluctable split in its meaning, since on the one hand, it describes the features of a natural or material phenomenon—for instance, astronomical orbits, climate, or human social behavior—while on the other, it identifies the analytic discourse aiming to organize what may otherwise seem to be incongruous elements. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* records among the earlier uses of *system*, for instance, in 1676 Matthew Hale would echo the first sense in remarking that “the Universe . . . comprehends the Systeme, Order and Excellencies of all created Beings.”⁴ By contrast, in 1699 Thomas Baker would stress the second

sense when he observed that “the moderns [are] . . . more pleas’d with their own inventions, than with the dry Systems of the Old Philosophers.”⁵ Several decades later, Samuel Johnson would confirm this semantic divide when, in his *Dictionary*, he described *system* as both “any complexure or combination of many things acting together” and “a scheme which reduces many things to regular dependence or co-operation.”⁶

The persisting ambiguity in the meaning of *system* fuels the suspicion that systems are individual creations rather than discovered truths, invented formulas rather than found artifacts. But for system’s advocates, the abiding semantic duality also attests to an underlying assumption—or at least an enduring hope—that the phenomenon in question and its description can ultimately arrive at a profound correspondence in which both are equally matched for the purposes of scientific, social, or political achievement. In fact, it is precisely system’s dual conceptualization that ideally qualifies it to serve as the mediating term in the biopolitical imagination, since it promises to bridge the formidable gap between “natural” and “artificial” registers—between the biological patterns that have been observed and the political gambits that motivate the desire to govern. The prospect of achieving such coordination—perhaps even concord—is underscored further by Clifford Siskin’s description of system as the late eighteenth-century genre par excellence. One sign of system’s rise, he points out, is quantitative: Whereas in 1700, 5 percent of all publications in England used *system* in their pages, by 1800 the number was a striking 40 percent.⁷ By the turn of the nineteenth century, he argues, this numerical increase had a conceptual corollary: System’s features not only saturated fields ranging from medicine to ethics to literary criticism but also provided the overarching framework by which the modern disciplines could be differentiated during the next several decades.⁸ It was precisely this kind of systematic organization—in which categories of knowledge are both distinguished from and linked to one another in a purportedly all-encompassing grid—that sustained the period’s ongoing interest in harnessing what were perceived as increasingly complex patterns of biological phenomena to the goals of political management.

In making the case for a biopolitical perspective that highlights the importance of both economics and system for late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century science, this volume draws on and extends the argu-

ments found in one of the most important collections on the history of science to appear in the past two decades, *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, published in 1999 and edited by William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer. Like the editors of that book, we track an anti-idealist approach to the history of science, with a particular interest in the ways that Michel Foucault's work helps describe the institutional, material, and disciplinary contexts for modern science's emergence at the turn of the nineteenth century. For that reason, we take one of our cues from the editors' remarks regarding how the "free market, liberal politics, and enlightened science dovetail" in the period's construction of a new public space in which scientific ideas and institutional authority could be promulgated.⁹ It should be noted, however, that with one exception, the contributors to *Sciences in Enlightened Europe* rely primarily on Foucault's work prior to his turn to examine what he called "biopower" in 1976. That exception is Andrea Rusnock, whose essay, titled "Biopolitics: The Political Arithmetic of the Enlightenment," draws on the first volume of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* in discussing the political implications of new methods for demographic calculation that emerged in the early eighteenth century.¹⁰ Given what we know now about Foucault's lectures that followed that volume of *History of Sexuality*, Rusnock's argument is strikingly prescient, and here, *Systems of Life* takes advantage of the additional benefit of the several volumes of Foucault's lectures that were published more recently and that reveal in greater detail his analysis of modern biopolitical regimes.

In the volumes that we have now documenting Foucault's university lectures during the late 1970s—including *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) and *Security, Territory, Population* (2009)—we find him making a strong case for the importance of economics in the formation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biopolitics in Europe. Regarding the eighteenth century, Foucault focuses particularly in *Security, Territory, Population* on the French physiocrats, whom he credits with formulating comprehensive theories of agricultural production, goods circulation, and scarcity patterns that proved instrumental in the growing European interest in the political management of the economy.¹¹ In turning to the nineteenth century in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault expands the parameters of his discussion to a more international scope, including Germany, Britain, and the United States, in

examining what he calls liberalism's "new form of political calculation" regarding economic prosperity, which evolved from the Enlightenment's decisive rejection of mercantilist principles.¹²

Although Foucault has offered by far the most extensive observations on the economics of biopolitics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it should be noted that two other prominent philosophers have also written more recently about similar topics. Inspired in part by Foucault's commentary, Roberto Esposito has offered an incisive discussion of John Locke's theory of property, arguing that Locke's construction of property follows a logic of "immunitary" protection, in which the process of asserting ownership of objects in the world serves the ambiguous function of exposing the liberal subject to potentially pernicious outside influences, while also presumably transforming them into a reliable benefit.¹³ Most recently, Giorgio Agamben has briefly discussed Adam Smith's articulation of political economy in the context of the Christian theological tradition of *oikonomia*, a term capturing the complex measures by which divine purpose is effectuated in the world—thereby revealing all the more concretely the providential logic of Smith's famous remark about "the invisible hand" that presumably guides the outcome of food markets.¹⁴

We cite these arguments in order to acknowledge the significant role that economics has periodically played in biopolitical discussions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while we also note that by and large, scholars working in these fields who draw on biopolitical perspectives have tended to overlook or downplay its importance. *Systems of Life* therefore aims to intervene in at least three ways in the current moment of biopolitical analysis, as well as in scholarly discussions pertinent to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First, in reaffirming the importance of economics as indicated by Foucault, Agamben, and Esposito, this volume seeks to expand elements of their arguments, while exploring new areas they have not considered. The contributors, for instance, examine further Foucault's claims about a structural homology among the emerging disciplinary fields during the eighteenth century (as in Christian Marouby's essay), and they also consider the ways in which Agamben's notion of the inherent order in *oikonomia* can be mapped onto vitalist notions of system in the 1790s (as in Richard Barney's piece). A second goal is to make Adam Smith a more central part of biopolitical analyses of the period, since Foucault's commentary

on his work has been relatively slight, while Agamben's has been notably short, though also compelling.¹⁵ Since, by and large, the bulk of biopolitical analyses of economics during the period have emphasized Continental contexts, we include here two essays (by Marouby and Catherine Packham) that reassess the relation of Smith's political economy to contemporary medical and biological science of the age. A third goal is to include the role of the aesthetic or the literary in our understanding of the relations among biological, economic, and political registers, since that element has rarely appeared in discussions by Foucault, Esposito, or Agamben, but as several of the essays here attest, it has played a significant discursive function in articulating the ways that biomedical issues could be "ordered" by economic or political concerns. In Amanda Goldstein's analysis of William Blake's *First Book of Urizen* and *Milton*, for example, as well as in Mrinalini Chakravorty's consideration of the legacy of Smithian economics in the visual art of colonial and postcolonial India, the aesthetic plays a key role in absorbing, reshaping, and often deflecting the biological dogmas of the day in relation to their economic and political implications.

The tripartite framework that this volume advocates regarding the biological, economic, and the political also suggests that for the purposes of theoretical and historical clarity, we can benefit substantially by prying apart—if only briefly—the two sets of terms that otherwise have by now been considered a consolidated unity: both *political economy* and *biopolitics*. Although we recognize the signal accomplishment of Adam Smith and his eighteenth-century European contemporaries, who forged an unprecedented and sophisticated conception of how the economic and the political could be coordinated, we want to consider that achievement not as a monolithic unity, but as a process with various strategies of translation and accommodation that merit close analysis, particularly with the added component of biological science involved. Regarding the nomenclature of biopolitics, by contrast with Agamben and Esposito, who make claims for the ultimate historical collapse of the biological into the political by the mid-twentieth century, we want to stress the ways that during the earlier era in question, the alliance between the political and the biological was often provisional, partial, and piecemeal—subject, that is, to frequent revaluation and revision, especially when the "economy" of that relation was in question. This is to say that rather than tracking the logic, for instance, of

Esposito's imagery of politics "crushing" biological life by the imposition of sheer force or power,¹⁶ this volume identifies a crucial intermediary space or agency constituted by the economic broadly conceived, whose emerging role during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to mediate between the biological and political spheres. In order to resist at least partially the historical telos invoked by Esposito and Agamben who look toward the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we therefore aim to consider the emergence of modern biopolitics as a far more exploratory, open-ended, sometimes even tentative process in its early stages.

We turn now to offer a more detailed, though brief, overview of the status of "system" with respect to the three areas that are this volume's focus: the biological sciences, economics, and politics. What follows describes not three variations on the notion of "system" that could fit into a neat unity—no matter what the talents of the era's systematizers—but instead a composite of distinct articulations whose potential for compatibility was precisely the challenge.

In 1792, the Scotsman Adam Ferguson declared that "the love of science and the love of system are the same."¹⁷ Indeed, during the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, the biological sciences fairly bristled with landmark discoveries, fundamental paradigm shifts, and ever more ambitious projects of systemization. In the medical sciences—including anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology—during the early 1700s, the term *system* was used relatively sparingly and, typically, it was applied primarily to denote the network of the body's nerves. In *Anatomy of the Humane Body*, for instance, first published in 1713 by the eminent surgeon William Cheselden, there is only one reference to a bodily system—the nerves—with only a few additions to that citation in the thirteen succeeding editions that appeared up to 1792.¹⁸ By the end of the century, however, *system* was being consistently applied to physiological systems of all kinds, including the limbic, arterial, digestive, cranial, and sensory versions. On a related front, by the middle of the eighteenth century, in the wake of arguments by Albrecht von Haller and others, an older, quasi-pneumatic model for the nerves had been generally replaced by one based on the description of the systemic cooperation of tensile fibers. George Cheyne,

who was largely responsible for popularizing this model in Britain during the 1730s, would use the term *system* sparingly but also tellingly in *The English Malady*, even speculating about what he called “the inanimate material System of Things” as evidence of God’s divine plan in the world.¹⁹

By the mid-1700s, the spheres of plants and animals received painstakingly meticulous and large-scale reorganization by experts such as Carl von Linné and the Comte de Buffon, whose natural systems—while frequently offering competitive interpretive perspectives—launched new confidence for at least another half century in the prospects of formulating a comprehensive biological science in their terms. Whereas Buffon preferred the rubric of natural history for his research, Linné was forthright in his advocacy of system as the solution to what he considered the confusing zoological and botanical categorizations of the past. His masterwork, first published as *Systema Naturae* in 1735 and rapidly translated into English, was to undergo numerous expanded editions during Linné’s lifetime and after his death. His systematic ambitions also proved to inspire scientists long after he died: At the turn of the nineteenth century, in ten volumes under the title *A Genuine and Universal System of Natural History*, Johann Friedrich Gmelin, physician and professor of natural history in the Royal Society of Göttingen, undertook the task of making Linné’s work “improved, corrected, and enlarged” by combining it with the work of Buffon, François Levaillant, Marcus Bloch, Albertus Seba, Maria Sibylla Merian, and Georg Wolfgang Knorr, among others.²⁰ The trend of systematic assimilation extended as well to imagining a complete system of knowledge *tout court*, as in William Duane’s text, called *An Epitome of the Arts and Sciences. Being a Comprehensive System of the Elementary Part of an Useful and Polite Education*, first published in 1805.²¹ It purported to encapsulate the areas of mathematics, languages, physics, architecture, agriculture, geography, politics, metaphysics, botany, mythology, astronomy, and zoology—a scope of description even broader than that in Diderot’s project in the *Encyclopédie*.

The turn of the nineteenth century consolidates a number of developments in the biological sciences by ultimately producing the new discipline of biology, which proposed to unify the study of life in all its forms. The first influential use of the term *biology* has varied accounts, since it appears in texts by Thomas Beddoes, Karl Friedrich Burdach, Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in dates ranging from 1799 to 1802.

Nonetheless, two factors in biology's emergence are worth stressing here. First, persistent advancements in microscopic technology supported research that culminated in the sea change of modern cell theory, articulated particularly by Theodor Schwann in the 1830s. That theory proved a conceptual linchpin for unifying an object of study whose specific cases—ranging from plants to animals to human beings—seemed otherwise impossibly disparate in other terms. The second thing to note is that cell theory was in some ways the laboratory confirmation of a much loftier, sometimes metaphysical, perspective articulated under the rubric of vitalism, whose aim of describing the fundamental principle of life itself—even with a capital “L”—found numerous scientific and literary advocates in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Lamarck, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Xavier Bichat, Humphry Davy, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake, John Thelwall, and Percy Shelley, to name only a few. Although vitalism's scientific arguments were often the target of skepticism or even controversy, they nonetheless relied heavily on the notion that “life” was a unified phenomenon precisely because it was systematically organized. As several of the contributors to this volume (e.g., Barney, Goldstein, and Annika Mann) also describe, the system of vital existence included not only the pure form of “life” biologically conceived, but also its inevitable ties to the economic and political realities of the historical moment.

As a last example of the biological and institutional legacy of “system” at the turn of the century, we turn to Edward Jenner's discovery of the first reliable form of vaccination against smallpox—then the most formidable disease in Europe—and the result that was both an immunological and sociopolitical revolution. In 1798, Jenner's description of realizing that controlled exposure to cowpox could in turn produce immunity to smallpox was carefully argued on the premise of a functional immunological system—a term he used frequently in his landmark publication, *An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of Variolæ Vaccinæ*, in order to link the distinct biological mechanisms related to bovine- and human-communicated disease.²² Not only would his techniques inaugurate a new era of preventing medical disease, they would also, in the ensuing decades, dramatically transform England's self-governance at home and abroad in the form of new national campaigns promoting public health, new protocols for upgrading military preparedness, and new methods for procuring the safety of the empire's co-

lonial personnel around the globe.²³ During the next several decades of the nineteenth century, the economic and political windfall of Jenner's medical discovery became increasingly palpable as a source of national and colonial pride.

As a final note on the politico-economic stakes of the biological sciences, particularly as related to race and colonialism, we turn briefly to the expanded edition of Linné's *Systema Naturae* mentioned earlier, since it highlights a theme of particular importance to several of this volume's contributors. That theme regards whatever inevitably resists or opposes systems, including, for example, chance, empirical singularity, the variable, and the nonconformist. Whereas Esposito has drawn on contemporary systems theory in order to describe a perspective that advocates for "open," rather than defensive, versions of biopolitical relations, the emphasis of the essays in *Systems of Life* is on those elements of systems that both subtend and undermine them.²⁴ In the context of Linné's work, then, the signal role of the asystematic can perhaps best be pinpointed by considering the striking frontispiece to volume 2 called "The Orang-Outang Carrying Off a Negro Girl" (see Figure I.1) since it illustrates in graphic ways the very challenge Linné faced in constructing his systematic anatomy of living forms.

Although several eighteenth-century travelogues reported such incidents, and although writers including Jean-Jacques Rousseau remained skeptical of their reliability, we want to focus here not on whether this incident actually happened so much as on the possibility that it offers one clue to the inevitable problems that systems confront in attempting to be systems. Put another way, we interpret this orangutan less as a misguided ape than as an allegorical and overweening natural taxonomist. If the heuristic goal of any system—its desire, if you will—is to relate but not to conflate, then this is precisely the problem at stake in the orangutan's apparently erotic seizing of the young black woman.

These are particularly acute stakes when we remember that one of the most controversial innovations of Linné's system of organization was to include both simians and human beings in the same category called "Anthropomorpha," based on the similarity of their anatomical structure. This move obviously blurred the line between the human and animal—for many, it even conflated what ought to be kept securely apart. We might say that in

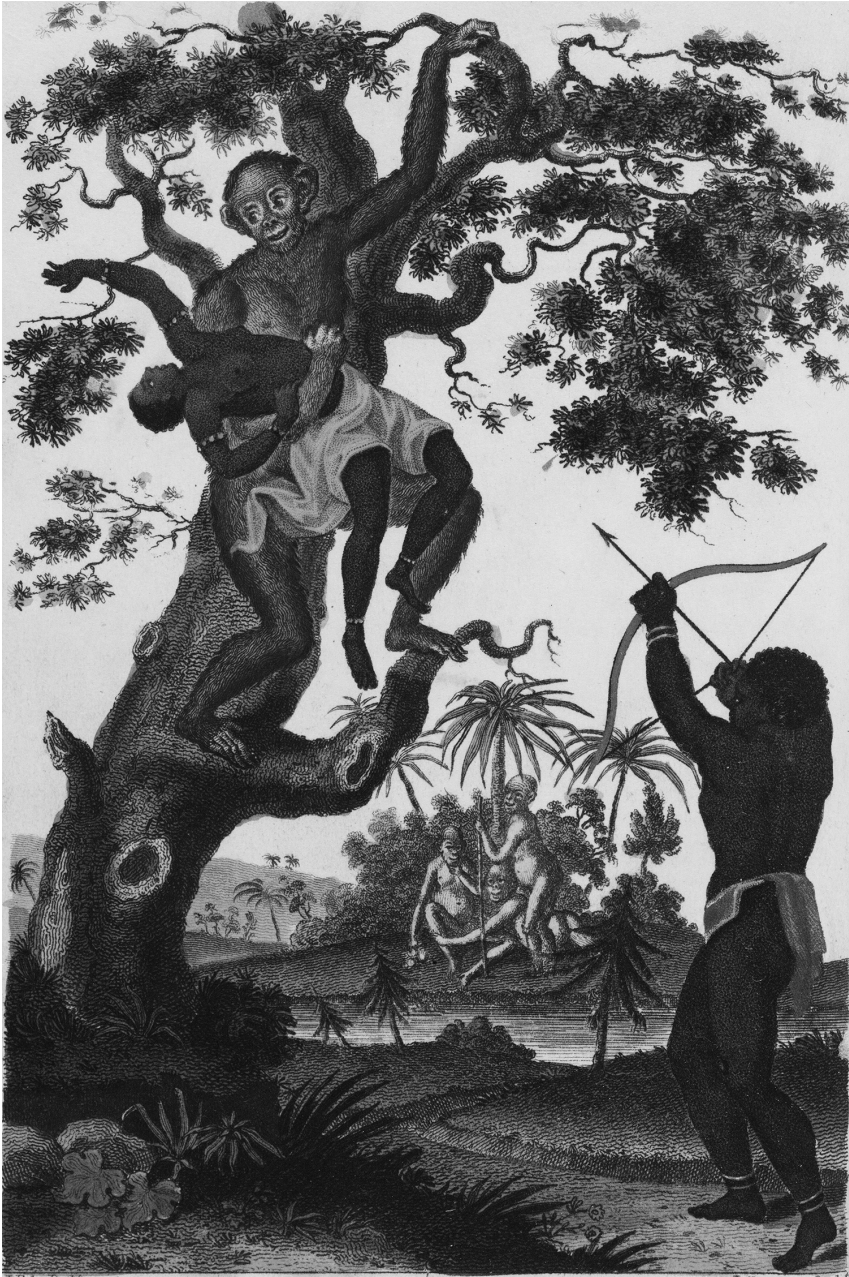


FIGURE 1.1. Frontispiece, volume 2 of Carl von Linné et al., *A Genuine and Universal System of Natural History* (1794–1807?). Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

synchronic terms of abstract categorization, Linné had gestured toward what Charles Darwin would later establish diachronically across time as the evolutionary link between lower species and human beings. In this context, it could be said that the orangutan in question has acted on perceiving an exaggerated similarity between itself and the woman. It has produced a disturbance in the system of species organization by violently threatening to collapse a distinction that that very system has both previously asserted and at least partially undermined—a violence compounded further in the illustration by the native archer poised to act in retaliation. To be sure, it is no mere coincidence that the trauma of this systemic instability is played out by being inflicted on the body of a non-European female and, potentially, on that of a nonhuman animal. The biopolitical implications of this kind of systemic violence—in terms including racial definition, social relations, and colonial policy—are in this volume the particular focus of James Ford and Mrinalini Chakravorty, who explore topics that include the problematic assertion—and telling erasure—of the human-animal distinction.

As might be expected, the increased use of “system” in a variety of fields was accompanied by an ever-increasing semantic differentiation that makes isolating the discrete meanings of *system* in this period unusually difficult. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary*, normally a dependably authoritative source for all the meanings of a given word, whether current or obsolete, literal or figurative, seems to falter at the exponential increase in the use of the word *system*, above all, outside of the physical and biological sciences. But if there is indeed a lack of clarity in the exposition of the distinct meanings of *system* according to the chronology of their appearance, it should be regarded as objective, existing at the level of discourse itself and the semantic and lexical linkages found there. This is not to say that the confusion that the use of the word generates can simply be understood as a contingent effect of its increased frequency, but rather points to the fact that there is something systematic about the ambiguities of the word *system*, as if its history as word and concept is marked by the paradox according to which “system” cannot accede to the condition (of systematicity) it designates. There is nothing metaphysical or transcendental about this paradox; it is immanent in the decidedly unsystematic history of the word *system*. In this context, rather than attempt to identify and assemble the meanings of *system* as it was used outside the sciences in a coherent arrangement, it might be more

productive to locate indices of semantic dispersion, a few points at which meanings cluster or clump: Hobbes, Swift, and Adam Smith.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Hobbes as the first to use *system* to signify “a set of persons working together as parts of an interconnecting network.” The reference is to a sentence in chapter 22 of *Leviathan* (1651), the only chapter, in fact, where the word *system* appears: “By Systemes; I understand any numbers of men joyned in one Interest, or one Businesse.”²⁵ That Hobbes, unlike most of his contemporaries, especially those who made frequent use of the term, would feel compelled to define *system*, suggests both the term’s semantic instability and Hobbes’s sense that this very instability allowed him to define and then use the term for his own purposes. It is worth noting that French translators of *Leviathan*, from the seventeenth century to the present, have consistently refrained from translating the word *systeme* as it is used in this chapter as *système* (if anything, a term more common in French than “system” was in English at that time and with at least as broad a semantic range), choosing instead to render it as “*organisation*.” In some sense, French translators have corrected Hobbes, as if to indicate that *system* is not exactly the right word here and would not be the right word in French, Italian, Spanish, or German (all of which had “system” at their disposal), because Hobbes’s use of the term, even with the definition he provides, risks confusing or misleading the reader. In *Leviathan*, *system* does not refer to the totality of interacting parts, whether of a commonwealth or of a body, nor even to a system within a system, a subsystem. Quite the contrary: Hobbes offers a definition not of *system* but of the plural *systems* (“By Systemes I mean . . .”), which emphasizes his decision to describe “the parts” of a commonwealth; he tells us that he will speak of “systems, which resemble the similar parts or muscles of a body natural.”²⁶

Further, his focus is not on the internal organization of these systems, but on the interaction between them that produces (or may inhibit) motion in and by the commonwealth as a whole. Because every system described in chapter 22 (at least initially and in principle) is composed of “men joined in one Interest, or one Businesse,” they can be categorized only by a set of oppositions that characterizes their relation to sovereignty and the order it works constantly to impose. Thus, a commonwealth governed by a sovereign who makes and enforces law possesses an internal structure that corresponds to what we think of as a system. But private systems may “consist

only in concourse of people,” an example of which would be “a conflux of People to markets.”²⁷ Such “irregular” systems are not formed by contractual agreements between individuals that would lay both prohibitions and obligations on the participants. They are nothing more than a temporary coincidence of “wills and inclinations”²⁸ that, lacking internal structure or coherence, cannot be expected to endure. Irregular systems may be perfectly innocent and therefore lawful, as in the case of a crowd moving toward the market. But they may also arise from an “evil intent”: If a thousand men “joyn” or sign a petition to be presented to a judge or magistrate by a handful of their representatives, their united action is lawful. If, however, “a thousand men come to present it, it is a tumultuous assembly, because there needs but one or two for that purpose. But in such cases as these, it is not a set number that makes the assembly unlawful, but such a number as the present officers are not able to suppress and bring to justice.”²⁹ “Tumult” is not simply what an unlawful private system brings to the sovereign order; it is more importantly what characterizes an “assembly” of this type: internal disorder and confusion. Here, the paradox referred to above is perfectly visible. It is an unlawful system in two senses: It both opposes the laws of the commonwealth and the principle of sovereignty by refusing to subject itself to them, and it is internally unlawful, an assembly without laws to govern it or impose upon it the consistency of functions that would seem to be the minimal definition of a system. At this point, the very notion of system seems less a way of describing the nature of human societies than a way of prescribing what they should be but are often not, a way of denying the effect of sheer numbers, of multitudes beyond any systematicity.

Hobbes, in this way, turns the word against itself, that is, against the notion that “system” is a synonym of order, coherence, and harmony that may serve with equal facility to designate both the *sistema dell’universo* attributed to Copernicus in Galileo’s *Dialogo* (1632) and the immutable teleology attributed to nature by Ralph Cudworth in the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) (the theses of which were already sketched out in his *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* [1731]).³⁰ Underlying Hobbes’s postulation of a paradoxically asystematic system is the system that opposes systematicity, an irregular and incoherent system that undermines the very notion of system as “a whole [*ensemble*] whose parts are coordinated by a

law.”³¹ This, of course, represents an extension of Hobbes’s argument that nature, rather than exhibiting a teleological order, is the source of political disorder, a tendency to entropy (as we would say today) in politics that only absolute sovereignty and the fear it inspires can counteract. Hobbes’s position provoked ever more energetic defenses of system understood as the actually existing organization of nature of which knowledge represents the discovery. Thus, Richard Cumberland in *De Legibus Naturae* (1672) (posthumously translated as *Treatise of the Laws of Nature* in 1727), a work whose purpose is to “consider and refute” Hobbes’s doctrines of both nature and the civil state, employs the term *system* as a conduit between (natural) philosophy and theology: “The World is a System or Whole, whose Parts are design’d and contriv’d mutually for one another; which plainly proves it to have been fram’d by a Being powerful, wise, and good.”³² Here in an extended commentary, Cumberland’s translator cites Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* (specifically, the section “The Moralists; A Philosophical Rhapsody”):

O my ingenious Friend! whose Reason, in other respects, must be allow’d so clear and happy; how is it possible that, with such Insight, and accurate Judgment in the Particulars of Natural Beings and Operations, you shou’d no better judge of the Structure of Things in general, and of the Order and Frame of Nature? Who better than yourself can shew the Structure of each Plant and Animal-Body, declare the Office of every Part and Organ, and tell the Uses, Ends, and Advantages to which they serve? How, therefore, should you prove so ill a Naturalist in this Whole, and understand so little the Anatomy of the World and Nature, as not to discern the same Relation of Parts, the same Consistency and Uniformity in the Universe!³³

The ease with which “system” could be annexed to the notion of providence, above all in the modern form of theodicy, and the ease with which theodicies explained away human sin and depravity as evils necessary to the production of a greater good than would have existed without them, provoked skeptical responses in thinkers as diverse as Blaise Pascal and Jonathan Swift. In the case of the latter, the extreme rarity of the term *system* in his corpus combines with the consistently pejorative meaning Swift imparts to it in order to offer a critique of the assumptions underlying the use of “system” in his time.

To begin with, in both *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) Swift, like Hobbes, either uses the term *system* in the plural or reminds us in a nominalist fashion that behind the general term *system* lies a plurality of irreducibly distinct systems, as if the reality of system exists in multiplicity, rather than unity, a fact that marks it as a human invention, even a kind of fiction created to allow us to believe in the possibility of *the* system, the system of the universe, the world or nature whose form and content are in principle knowable, even if they remain for now unknown. It was not that Swift rejected the idea of providence, which might be understood as system, but rather that the precise design of providence or the specific form of the government of things, the concatenation of which constituted the divine order, represented that which had been "agreed on all hands impossible to be known."³⁴ In a way surprisingly close to Kant, Swift suggests that the notion of a system of nature or the world represented a "lawless use of reason,"³⁵ a reasoning beyond the limits of reason that by that very fact ceases to be rational. The information it brings back from its quest to comprehend the totality is no more credible than the stories of talking horses and flying islands that Gulliver (nearly a homonym of "gullible," as many readers have noted) recounts following his voyages. But it was not only those cases of reason's inability or unwillingness to impose or acknowledge limits on its own activity that led Swift in "The Digression concerning Madness" in *A Tale of a Tub* to define the disposition to introduce new schemes or systems as the effect of a species of madness. It was also the fact that a "man in the natural state or course of thinking" could never "conceive it in his power to reduce the notions of all mankind exactly to the same length, and breadth, and height of his own."³⁶ Descartes, for example, "reckoned to see before he died the sentiments of all philosophers, like so many lesser stars in his romantic system, rapt and drawn within his own vortex."³⁷ Thus, Swift sees Descartes, the creator of a "romantic" or "fantastical" philosophical system, as different only in degree from Alexander the Great: Without madness, Swift's narrator remarks, humankind "would not only be deprived of those two great blessings, conquests and systems," but would be "reduced to the same belief in things invisible."³⁸ The revolutions in philosophy, whether ancient or modern, have been undertaken in the hope of "subduing multitudes" and imposing on them a system that, by claiming to encompass the totality of what is, denies the primacy of the invisible over the visible and unknowable

over the knowable. Systems are thus parts represented as wholes; appearing to include and explain all natural phenomena, their true function is the exclusion of what lies beyond nature, that is, the infinite beyond all totalization. In the third voyage of *Gulliver's Travels*, when Gulliver arranges a disputation between the moderns Descartes and Gassendi, and Aristotle, the latter explains that the project of producing *the* system of nature, whether through discovery or elaboration, can result instead only in an unending succession of "new systems of nature . . . which would vary in every age; and even those, who pretend to demonstrate them from mathematical principles, would flourish but a short period of time, and be out of vogue when that was determined."³⁹

This is the point at which Swift's notion of system as conquest, or as the philosophical correlative of conquest and empire—that is, command and subjection—meets that of Hobbes. System is in both cases a matter of force or forces. For Hobbes, system is necessary to political existence because nature (including and especially human nature) is the source of disorder that must be overcome and replaced by the artifice of the civil state whose stability rests on a primary passion: fear. But because fear is a passion and as such can on occasion be subjected to the power of other passions, such as pride and the quest for glory and reputation, regular and lawful systems (or "organizations") contain the seeds of irregularity and unlawfulness, as the experience of the collapse of the English monarchy beginning in 1642 showed. For Swift, by contrast, nature is the source of order, but this order rests on "invisible" and unknowable grounds that mark the limits of human understanding. Modern philosophy, however, is defined by its refusal to accept such limits in principle, and by its objective of encompassing and comprehending nature as a whole, that is, as a system. Philosophy, ignoring boundaries and borders, has declared itself master of the world and forcibly annexed the regions once regarded as the domain of theology or simply religion. Not only is philosophy no longer the servant of theology, as Aquinas had argued, but theology is now reduced to "a lesser star" in its system, a province in the empire philosophy sought to extend over the entire world. If Hobbes and Swift, otherwise opposed in their thinking, were united in seeing system as conquest (of an original and natural disorder for Hobbes and for Swift an unjustified and unnatural crossing of borders to storm heaven), their resistance to the more common view renders visible the

secularization of providence in the form of the order of nature or the world and the transformation of a transcendental teleology into a purely immanent economy of self-regulation that made the modern notion of system possible.⁴⁰

It was Adam Smith who, perhaps alone, succeeded both in redefining system and its synonyms—above all, economy—as forms of an immanent order not directed from without, whether by a God or by humanity conceived as the anthropological ground of any theology, and in rendering system simultaneously the mode of organization of the political world (in the broadest sense) and its principle of intelligibility. In fact, if we set aside chronology for a moment, it is possible and indeed productive to read Smith’s definition of *system* in the posthumously published early text, the *History of Astronomy*, as a nearly exact account of the concept of system against which Swift’s satire was directed. By applying a version of the theory that societies are composed of an economic base and a legal and cultural superstructure (which Marx later appropriated for his own purposes), Smith argued that a society where subsistence is no longer precarious and where laws regulate the activities of individuals renders humankind (or those within it who enjoy leisure time)

more attentive to the appearances of nature, more observant of her smallest irregularities, and more desirous to know what is the chain which links them all together. That some such chain subsists betwixt all her seemingly disjointed phenomena they are necessarily led to conceive; and that magnanimity, and cheerfulness which generous natures acquire who are bred in civilized societies, where they have so few occasions to feel their weakness, and so many to be conscious of their strength and security, renders them less disposed to employ for this connecting chain, those invisible beings whom the fear and ignorance of their rude forefathers had engendered.⁴¹

Smith’s critique of explanation by reference to “invisible beings” as products of ignorance and fear, which in turn are products of a primitive way of life characterized by insecurity and precariousness, resembles the critique of superstition found in Lucretius and Spinoza. Further, it would be difficult not to apply it to the declarations made in the New Testament (e.g., Hebrews 1:15–16) concerning earth and heaven, things visible and invisible, the invisible God, and so on. For Smith, knowledge is the search for the chain

(postclassical Latin: *concatenatio*), the concatenation or connection of all things that initially appear as a heap of “disjointed phenomena.” Shortly after the passage cited above, he advances a definition of philosophy as “the science of the connecting principles of nature.” If nature “seems to abound with events which appear solitary and incoherent with all that go before them,” it is because the imagination takes nature as the “confusions and distractions” characteristic of the movement of its own ideas. In opposition, “philosophy, by representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavors to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination.”⁴² It is thus not enough for philosophy to discover the “invisible chains” that bind together what appear to be separated objects; it must “represent” these chains, making them visible and present, as if it were a kind of a microscope or telescope, the connections either too small or too distant to be visible to the naked eye. Whereas both “experience” and imagination succeed only in representing what is invisible as absent and thereby bring “tumult” to the mind, philosophy “endeavors to introduce order into the chaos” and, by means of its ever-increasing power of representation, demonstrates the (distant or heretofore indemonstrable) presence of the chain that “subsists betwixt all” phenomena, allowing what must be understood as connected but also chained together to form an intelligible whole, just as Newton showed that gravity “was the connecting principle which joined together the movements of the planets.”⁴³

But Smith is not simply concerned to constitute a whole by representing the system or concatenation of phenomena previously regarded as disjointed. He must also explain how the “smallest of the co-existent parts of the universe” together with what appear to be “the most insignificant of the successive events which follow one another, make parts, and necessary parts, of that great chain of causes and effects” that he will call in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* “the great machine of the universe” or the “oeconomy of nature.” The task of philosophy is to demonstrate the invisible and thus far unconceptualized system of causes and effects necessary to the function of the machine that it is, not only with regard to the motion of the planets but to the motion of human individuals as well. Smith argues that the pleasures of wealth and “the system, the machine or the oeconomy by means of which it is produced,” strike “the imagination as something grand and

beautiful and noble.” This “deception,” as Smith calls it, considered in isolation seems like an illusion that should be confronted by truth; but to dispel the illusion would be to break the chain of causes “which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind.”⁴⁴ We are at this point only a few sentences away from Smith’s account of that other systemic and systematic deception, a necessary condition of industry’s continual motion, which arises on the basis of the invisibility of the invisible hand that must also be seen as a systemic and necessary invisibility. Just as in Leibniz’s theodicy where God permits only those sins necessary to the production of a greater good than could have existed without them, so for Smith it is the “selfishness and rapacity” of the “proud and unfeeling” landlord, not charity or fellow-feeling, that cause him to provide for the poor through his very drive for wealth.⁴⁵ Regarded in isolation, these qualities would merit only condemnation, but seen from the point of view of the system of which they are necessary parts, these ignoble sentiments lead to the sharing of the spoils of the rich with the poor. The invisible hand is nothing more than that chain of events or movements that guarantees the functioning of the machine of political economy.

It is at this point that Smith introduces another distinction: It is clear in the case of political economy that there exists a multitude of systems fabricated by human beings according to faulty premises, themselves based on an ignorance of the system of nature of which human economy must necessarily be a part. If such a system bears any resemblance to a machine, it is to a machine that cannot work because it was built without any knowledge of the basic laws of physics. Once again, philosophy must step in to represent the invisible chains that bind together seemingly disjointed events. The appearance of chaos in the matter of the production of life’s necessities and the inability to grasp the system that cannot be created but only represented because it belongs to nature itself, leads to a succession of faulty and inoperable systems that reintroduce precariousness and dearth where there should be order and plenty. To represent the invisible chains that bind all things in coherence, philosophy must clear away all that covers the invisible connections to make them visible and allow their obviousness to operate on the human mind: Thus Smith argues in the *Wealth of Nations* that when “all systems either of preference or of restraint” are “thus completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes

itself of its own accord.”⁴⁶ Here the system of natural liberty, of course, refers to the market itself, freed from wage and price regulations; it is a system that thinks and acts “of its own accord” and that, because the liberty it exercises is natural, requires nothing other than itself to become “established,” that is, founded in both principle and fact.

It is on this point that Rousseau, or at least Rousseau as read by Pierre Macherey in the excerpt included in the present volume, offers a preemptive or anticipatory critique of Smith. For Smith, the “liberty” of the unhampered market is not only superior to other possible systems, all of which are characterized by some form of external and artificial interference (either preference or restraint), but it is also the only organization of economic activity that can legitimately be called a “system” at all. The others can be described only as false systems insofar as they are not closed, self-directed and self-regulating totalities, but pseudo-totalities, permanently open to the effects of forces necessarily outside the operation of the economy. Market liberty is “natural,” a set of laws not made but discovered that invariably govern the movement of goods as if they were the system of bodies moving through the heavens described by Newton. One of Rousseau’s most effective and influential philosophical interventions was his critique of the concept, central to the political theories of Hobbes and Locke, of the state of nature or the natural condition of humanity. At issue was not the version of the state of nature offered by either philosopher (whether it was a state of war or peace, whether property did or did not exist in such a state), but the very notion of a natural condition, of an original state that existed prior to society and from which essential and invariant human characteristics could be deduced, the acknowledgment of which would be the basis for any human social system. Smith, as is well known, carefully avoided the question of whether “the propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another” can be understood as “one of those original principles in human nature” or as “the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech.”⁴⁷ His appeal to nature, to the order it imposes irresistibly both on human individuals and the societies their existence demands, occurs at the level of organization. Because for him there is no transition from a state of nature to the civil state, given that the mere existence of human beings requires the unwitting cooperation of a great many of their fellows, the con-

cept of nature appears elsewhere than in Hobbes and Locke: It appears at the level of life and the means of subsistence that allows the species to continue.

But as Rousseau remarked of Smith's predecessors: They have gone in search of nature and found only their own society in disguise. The very assertion of nature, human nature, or an original natural condition, is a justification of the existing state of affairs, and the search for nature is a circular journey back to the social present. If, for Smith, the distinction between true and false systems rests on the prior distinction between the natural (the unrestrained market) and the artificial (a market directed according to human decision), between what pertains to the origin and that which can only be understood as foreign to it, Rousseau's critique would apply to Smith's notion of the natural liberty of the market just as much as to Locke's theory of the liberty of man in the state of nature. For Smith, like Locke, nature works as a kind of necessary supplement to the immanent rationality of the system of the market, a certification of its systematicity.

If at a distance the three thinkers we have focused on here—Hobbes, Swift, and Smith—represent clusters in the dispersion pattern of the distinct meanings of “system” in literature, political economy, and philosophy written in English during the long eighteenth century, the view from within their texts reveals considerable anxiety about the very notion of system. For Hobbes, the existence of what he provocatively calls “systems” poses an insuperable threat to what he just as provocatively refrains from calling “the system” of political order. The proliferation of irregular systems as if through a kind of parodic miniaturization (*imperium in imperio*) produces counterstates and counterpowers that constantly require attempts to contain them by the sovereign power. To Swift, systems are not discovered but made in order to be passed off as discoveries of some aspect of nature, a means of endowing the fabricator with authority and power. The idea of the system of nature is a claim to know what must remain in principle unknown, the whole composed of all that exists, which endows the discoverer with the authority to determine the order of places and functions within this whole. Smith's work marks the triumph of system, or better, systematicity. Borrowing freely from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reflections on providence, and the debates on the origins of evil and sin, Smith produces a

theory of a self-establishing system whose apparent faults or failures are simply the invisible causal connections necessary to the whole.

The essays collected in this volume consider a broad range of issues related to the interconnections among the biological sciences, economics, and politics in contexts that include Great Britain, France, and the American colonies. Whereas some of them examine all three areas in considerable detail, and several consider explicitly the challenges of system-building, others focus on specific cases—such as the economic valences of vitalist tropes or the biopolitical implications of Charles Darwin’s portrayal of gravity—whose significance complements and extends the framework we have already described. We offer here an overview of these essay’s arguments, with an eye toward the contribution they make to that framework.

Christian Marouby in “Looking for (Economic) Growth in the Eighteenth Century” examines the paradox that while biological metaphors, particularly those of the human body, were common, even central, in eighteenth-century economics, the idea of economic growth was starkly absent. For Quesnay, and following him, Smith, the relation between body and economy was finally more than metaphorical: It was a relation of functional homology. This notion allowed a kind of medicalization of economic policy, with a clear preference for homeopathic treatments that would allow the system to heal or regulate itself in opposition to the attempts to interfere with the circulation and movement necessary to the function of both systems. As Marouby shows, such a model nearly foreclosed the question of growth insofar as it focused on maintaining what amounted to a system based on static rather than dynamic equilibrium. But for Smith in particular, the near absence of a concept of economic growth arose from his conflicting views of the barriers to progress, since on the one hand, they seemed natural, the insufficiency of natural resources for an increasing population, while on the other they appeared to be a consequence of human laws and customs that served only to inhibit the operation of the economy of nature, which in turn became the nature of the economy.

In “An African Diasporic Critique of Violence,” James Ford constructs a kind of conversation among Walter Benjamin (based primarily on his 1922 essay “The Critique of Violence”), the African American poet Phillis

Wheatley (ca. 1754–83), and Kant (above all his later political writings). Ford begins with Benjamin's implicit critique of Kant's project of a cosmopolitan perpetual peace that, despite Kant's frequent references to colonialism and the distinction between civilized and savage peoples, focuses only on intra-European violence. It is Benjamin's discussion of the myth of Niobe, also the subject of one of Wheatley's best-known poems, that furnishes the occasion for the inclusion of an African voice in a conversation that now must include the realities of chattel slavery, conquest, and colonialism. The killing of Niobe's children by the gods as punishment for demanding that she, her family, and ultimately humanity be honored for the building of cities, rather than the gods, may be read as the effacing of the legacy of production through a massacre that will maintain the prestige of the gods. Kant's system of perpetual peace lays the foundations for violence that, because it arises on the basis of law rather than against it, can itself only be perpetual.

In the text of a lecture previously unpublished and appearing here for the first time in English translation,⁴⁸ Pierre Macherey examines the contradictions internal to the concept of pity as it develops in Rousseau's work. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), pity pertains to human beings, as well as to animals, both as living individuals and as members of a natural species; as such, it operates outside of and prior to the intervention of reason or logic. Not only is pity not opposed to the passions that incline each individual to preserve his or her own existence, it is in fact the form self-love takes in a world prior to the imposition of the distinction between self and other. Pity in its natural state is that immediate and total identification with the sufferings of others, the affective correlative of the preservation and reproduction of life without any clear separation between oneself and one's fellows (*semblables*). But as Macherey observes, if pity in this sense is natural to human beings, "nature" for Rousseau is not only not destiny, but it has been reduced, at least among the so-called civilized part of humanity, to a purely potential or latent existence that, if it can be actualized at all, must be reawakened through education. The development of Rousseau's work is marked by an increasing fear that pity, the natural and original sentiment that made society among human individuals possible, has by virtue of its progress, effaced its own starting point. Pity in its natural state withers away with the progress of civilization: Rousseau's history is not a progress from natural origin to end, based on essential and invariant propensities that

allow us to distinguish between natural and artificial systems as Smith does. It is instead a history of the ways in which the effect of progress is to destroy what made it possible, the process, marked by contingency and unpredictability, by which nature disappears into what is other than itself, until it is lost forever. It is not even clear that the pity that can (and must in fact) be taught shares anything other than the name with the emotion that once led humans to defend and promote the lives of others with the same urgency as they would their own

In “System and Subject in Adam Smith’s Political Economy: Nature, Vitalism, and Bioeconomic Life,” Catherine Packham argues that, although the importance of the concept of “system” has been widely noted in scholarly commentary on Adam Smith, there are crucial distinctions between the different ways system was conceived both in and around Smith’s work. Of these, none was as essential for Smith as the distinction between the system fabricated by human beings in their endeavor both to know and to control natural processes, on the one hand, and systems that are discovered, understood as proper to the order or economy of nature itself and therefore unchangeable through human action, on the other. The notion of a system of nature furnished the basis for the idea of a “system of commerce” whose laws were as unalterable as the laws of motion governing the physical world. But Packham goes on to show that metaphors drawn from the organic world are even more important in establishing Smith’s conception of the economic world and the place of the human subject in it. It is this set of metaphors that allows him to postulate the disastrous effects of outside intervention to heal the body’s maladies and to argue that the order of political economy is like that of a living organism that can regulate itself with greater efficiency than any external agent. Finally, such a position calls into question the very notion of individual agency or choice independent of the necessary motions of the system.

In “Vitalism’s Revolution: John Thelwall, Life, and the Economy of Radical Politics,” Richard A. Barney examines how Thelwall, the notorious political agitator and public speaker inspired by the French Revolution, formulated a version of vitalism that could implement his aim for economic and political change in late eighteenth-century Britain. In adapting Agamben’s notion of “economic theology” to revolutionary contexts, Barney argues that

“economy” in several senses serves to mediate between Thelwall’s vitalist conception of the human body and its availability for creating more equitable socioeconomic relations. Since for Thelwall, human physiology relied on extracting what he called “electrical fluid” from the air via the lungs, it was a fundamentally open system whose natural form should in turn inform a new egalitarian politics. In *The Peripatetic* (1793), Thelwall’s sprawling, multigeneric novel that documents the meandering travels of his fictional stand-in, Sylvanus Theophrastus, “economy” serves as the practical conduit by which the disposition of human bodies is channeled into their respective sociopolitical uses and abuses. Thelwall’s commitment to systemic openness, however, produces a narrative oriented around the principle of what he calls “susceptibility,” whose features generate a vital sensitivity to suffering of all kinds (both animal and human), a relentless unmaking and remaking of systemic constructs, and ultimately a recasting of more traditional notions of political sovereignty by radically distributing it throughout the natural and human world.

Annika Mann’s “Writing Generation: Revolutionary Bodies and the Poetics of Political Economy” examines the ways that the poetry of Anna Barbauld and William Blake—in “To a Little Invisible Being, Expected Soon to Become Visible” and *The First Book of Urizen*, respectively—draws on and deflects the reigning vitalist and revolutionary paradigms of the day. Although both authors, she argues, portray “generation” in the sense of both biological reproduction and literary production in terms registering vitalism’s investment in epigenesis, which posits fetal development as a matter of increasing complexity, they also evoke imagery from the rival model of “preformationism,” which treated the embryo as a complete entity in miniature, growing only in size. This dual portrait, Mann explains, relates less to the authors’ ambivalence regarding the medical models than it does to their refusal of the terms of political or economic debate about generation offered by Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and Malthus, for whom generation embodied the threat of writing’s ability to produce a host of misguided political adherents, or alternately, the literal swelling of the population to catastrophic excess. Hence in “Invisible Being,” Barbauld insists on the ultimate inability of poetry to represent or call forth the unborn child that it addresses, while in *Urizen*, Blake portrays the creation of both books and

bodies as a life-enchaining process fated to replicate itself, regardless of its original political motivation. Mann concludes from this daunting scenario that both Barbauld's and Blake's works therefore pose a significant challenge to prominent scholarly accounts of Romanticism's commitment to vitalist and individualist poetics.

In "William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny," Amanda Jo Goldstein also takes on Blake and the question of vitalism, although with a distinct perspective that parses the differences between competing epigenesis theories, as well as Blake's diverging portrayals of generation in *The First Book of Urizen* and *Milton*. Despite Blake's assimilation by scholars to a Romantic ethos stressing organic self-organization, Goldstein argues that in *Urizen*, Blake caustically satirizes the notion of self-production in the character of Urizen himself, before turning to offer more appealing alternatives in *Milton*. Constructing a history of epigenesis that begins with William Harvey's landmark seventeenth-century theory, Goldstein delineates two competing strains in this logic of emergent formation: one stressing the self-generated origin of life-forms (epitomized particularly by Kant's notion of "self-organizing being") and another emphasizing the formative participation of social and material milieus (as captured by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin), whereby biological growth constitutes what Goldstein calls "a work of acute historical and circumstantial dependency." In embracing this second strain, Blake frequently characterizes generation using the imagery of ongoing labor, social interaction, and even industrial activity, and in *Milton* he goes further to represent Antamon as a figure of susceptible, creative, and healing scientific inquiry. In addition to considering the political implications of this perspective—including its de-emphasis of the dynamic of applied power—Goldstein turns at the end of her essay to consider the relevance of Blake's views to the emergence of epigenetics in twentieth- and twenty-first-century evolutionary biology, as a counter to genocentric science.

In her essay, "Concerning Hunger: Empire Aesthetics in the Present Moment," Mrinalini Chakravorty explores the aesthetic representation of hunger that has accompanied liberal and neoliberal theories of the world market and globalization from their origins in the conflicting theories of Smith and Malthus. The first assured his readers that the unrestrained market could calculate the ratio of supply to demand and direct individual in-

terest to manage food supplies so that subsistence crises would never be seen again—that is, in those societies organized on the basis of the unrestricted market. The second, by contrast, presented a dystopian counter to Smith's liberal utopia. A natural imbalance between food supply and population growth would lead to famine, the means by which the equilibrium of the natural order would be restored. Despite Smith's valorization of sympathy and Malthus's fear of its effects on social discipline, both viewed hunger as a failure on the part of the hungry in Europe and as a failure of government and the hungry in the colonial worlds of India and China. Colonial and postcolonial visual arts express, Chakravorty argues, the impossibility of sympathetic identification with the hungry who are represented as nature's waste or in the postcolonial context as absent, having been supplanted by the sheer quantity of things in circulation around the world.

In "The Hero Takes a Fall: Gravity, Comedy, and Darwin's Entangled Bank," Timothy C. Campbell focuses on the famous final passage in Darwin's *Origin of Species* in order to critique and revise Darwin's aim of elevating the evolutionary importance of natural selection over the negligible role of gravity observable in planetary orbits. Campbell reads Darwin's account of the process of species differentiation and survival as riven by assumptions that stress encroachment, destructive competition, and even an "attack on the common in a polity," a biopolitical scenario he reorients, drawing on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze, by considering gravity as an agent capable of fostering free-floating difference and "equalizing . . . forms and laws" across the sociopolitical spectrum. Deleuze's views on unfixed difference, Campbell continues, suggest the relevance of the comic, since they attune us to the affirmative potential of difference over and against natural selection. Hegel's views on comedy add the further dimension that by contrast with tragedy, comedy affirms both the individual subject—including a sense of mastery—and the accident of circumstances, thereby creating a situation in which confident agency, but also an inevitable fall, must be equally acknowledged. This capacious perspective, Campbell concludes, should motivate us to persist in the aim of identifying a "comedy of bios," because it can counter the tendency to lament the biopolitical tragedy of what we have made of ourselves by locating the necessary value of new potentialities in both biological and political terms.

NOTES

1. This volume has been derived from a conference we organized at the Huntington Library titled "Systems of Life: Economics, Politics, and the Biological Sciences, 1750–1850," which took place November 9–10, 2012.
2. Michel-Pierre Lerner, "The Origin and Meaning of World System," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 36, no. 4 (2005): 407–41.
3. Walter Ong, "System, Space, and Intellect in Renaissance Symbolism," *CrossCurrents* 7, no. 2 (1957): 130.
4. Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (London, 1677), qtd. in the *OED* under System, I.3.a. "A group or set of related or associated things perceived or thought of as a unity or complex whole."
5. Thomas Baker, *Reflections upon Learning* (London, 1699), qtd. in the *OED* under System, II.13.b: "A body of theory or practice relating to or prescribing a particular form of government, religion, philosophy, etc."
6. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (London, 1756), 2:n.p.
7. Clifford Siskin, "Counting Down to Disciplinarity," lecture at Columbia University, April 21, 2016. Siskin bases these calculations on metadata analysis of the titles listed in Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO).
8. See Clifford Siskin, "The Year of the System," in *1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Richard Cronin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 9–31; and "Mediated Enlightenment: The System of the World," in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 164–72. Although for Ong, this historical moment constitutes "a real epidemic of systems" ("System," 133), in which a penchant for visually objectified knowledge runs rampant, for Siskin it represents the foundation of conceptual terms whose legacy was to organize methodically what we now know as modern disciplinary life.
- Since this introduction was composed before the publication of Siskin's *System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016), our argument does not fully benefit from Siskin's most important work to date on the subject. For his discussion of published texts and title pages with the word *system*, see 17–18, 34–36; the emergence of modern disciplines, 61–62, 121–45; and Adam Smith's contribution to system's conceptualization, 92–95, 121–26, 164–65.
9. William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer, Introduction to *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, ed. William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 26.
10. See Andrea A. Rusnock, "Biopolitics: The Political Arithmetic of the Enlightenment," in *Sciences*, 49–68.

11. For his discussion of the physiocrats, see *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), esp. 17–19, 34–37, 59–73; and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), esp. 53–54, 145–46, 284–86, 320–21.
12. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 58.
13. See Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 63–69.
14. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 283–87. Foucault also discusses Smith’s “invisible hand” in *Birth of Biopolitics*, 278–82.
15. Foucault does not mention Smith in *Security, Territory, Population*, whereas in *Birth of Biopolitics*, he mentions the *Wealth of Nations* several times, but without going into much detail; his most extensive comments can be found on 53–54, 278–82. Agamben’s full text on Smith in *Kingdom and the Glory* is cited in n. 14 above.
16. See, for instance, Esposito’s comment in *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zaiya Hanafi (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2011), 14, where he remarks that “the biopolitical apparatus tends to eliminate any mediation” between itself and the biological, “reducing it to a state of absolute immediacy,” and resulting in “life being crushed into its nude biological content.” He makes similar remarks about the law on page 32, and about the norm in *Bios*, 190.
17. Adam Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (Edinburgh, 1792), 1:278.
18. See William Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Humane Body* (London, 1713), 138. In later editions, such as the seventh in 1750, Cheselden added references to the “arterial system” (199) and the “venal system of the liver” (“Index,” n.p.).
19. George Cheyne, *The English Malady; or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds* (London, 1733), 59. For a sampling of his use of *system*, see 10, 12, 25, 53, 58, 64.
20. See Carl von Linné, *A Genuine and Universal System of Natural History*, vol. 2 (London, 1795), title page. The ten-volume series was published from 1794 to 1807.
21. See William Duane, *An Epitome of the Arts and Sciences: Being a Comprehensive System of the Elementary Part of an Useful and Polite Education: Upon the Plan of a Similar Work of R. Turner*, L.L.D. (Philadelphia, 1805).
22. For his use of the term *system*, see Edward Jenner, *An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of Variolæ Vaccinæ* (London, 1798), 5, 6, 12, 19, 22, 29, 34, 37, 41, 43, 70.

23. For a succinct discussion of the results of Jenner's findings, including Britain's ensuing projects for promoting national and international hygiene, see Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee, "The Jenneration of Disease: Vaccination, Romanticism, and Revolution," *Studies in Romanticism* 39, no. 1 (2000): 139–63.

24. For Esposito's use of systems theory, particularly as formulated by Niklas Luhmann, see *Bios*, 49–50, and *Immunitas*, 45–51; for his discussion of "open" systems, see *Immunitas*, 165–67.

25. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 155.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.* As Hobbes will explain later in *Behemoth*, his history of the rebellion and civil war of the 1640s: "This method of bringing petitions in a tumultuary manner, by great multitudes of clamorous people, was ordinary with the House of Commons, whose ambition could never have been served by way of prayer and request, without extraordinary terror." See Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth*, ed. Stephen Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 97.

30. The *Treatise* was composed in the 1660s, but not published until much later, in 1731.

31. Pontus de Tyard, *Les discours philosophiques* (Paris, 1559), 54b.

32. Richard Cumberland, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (1727), trans. John Maxwell (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 892.

33. *Ibid.*, 893.

34. Jonathan Swift, *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis, 14 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939), 1:105.

35. Immanuel Kant, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking," *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16.

36. Swift, *Prose Works*, 1:105.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 11:159.

40. On this point, see Giorgio Agamben, "The Invisible Hand," in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 278–88.

41. Adam Smith, "The History of Astronomy," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1980), 50.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, 98.

44. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 183.
45. Ibid., 184.
46. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), 2:687.
47. Ibid., 1:25.
48. This piece first appeared as part of the online material for a course at the University of Lille titled “The Sharing of Sentiments: Elements for a Natural and Social History of Sympathy.”

Looking for (Economic) Growth in the Eighteenth Century*Christian Marouby*

In the eighteenth century, the preoccupation with what we now call economic growth, the expansion of the production and consumption of all traded goods and services, seems to be everywhere. As the programmatic titles of both Smith's and Turgot's most important works, as well as the content of countless others, make clear, the desire to increase the wealth of nations—the desire to “grow” the economy, as we would say—is the universal concern of all the first great elaborations of the new political economy, whether such growth is seen as easily attainable or not, and by what means, and whether it might for the first time be conceived as potentially infinite, or on the contrary doomed to finitude. As for the actual occurrence of economic growth itself, as we measure it, there is now general agreement that eighteenth-century Europeans—whether they believed it or not—were indeed witnessing the beginning of the surging trend that was to become so spectacular in the following two hundred years.

But the concept that “life” was organized by overlapping functional systems, inviting us to reflect on the contemporary emergence of the discipline of political economy and of biological science in the late eighteenth century, and the possible influences and cross-currents between the two, prompts me to raise a question that has been puzzling me for some time: If the specificity and importance of the processes of life were being discovered and elaborated at the same time as those of economics, if we are to expect epistemic congruence and intellectual fertilization, as it were, between those discoveries, why did the figure of “economic growth,” an obviously biological metaphor now so common as to be used unconsciously even by noneconomists, take so long to appear, let alone become naturalized? Did anybody talk, or even think, of economic growth in the eighteenth century?

To be sure, there is throughout this period an intense preoccupation with population growth—whether it is sufficient or not—and its relation to the economy. Long before Malthus, it had been recognized that human fertility exerts a constant pressure against the productive capacity of the land, and could threaten the well-being of populations and the wealth of the nation.¹ But that is biological growth itself, not economic growth, and if anything, as we move further in time, we find a tendency to separate the one from the other: Whereas in the seventeenth century an abundant population had frequently been seen as wealth itself, it is now merely seen as a sign, or a measure of wealth, and that only if it is prosperous. The problem is no longer how to grow the population, but how to produce the wealth that will make such biological growth possible.² The economy and the number of human bodies are no longer confused.

However, it is true that the old analogy between the human body and the body politic was still alive enough in this period to suggest a metaphorical “body economic,” where (as in La Fontaine’s fable “The Members and the Stomach”) the social body produces and consumes like a real body—we shall later encounter at least one such analogy. And more directly relevant to the question of growth, we also still find the related and even more ancient analogy between the maturation of the human body, “the ages of man,” and that of peoples and nations—witness at the outer end of the period the power of this latent metaphor in Gibbon. And so political economies can be seen to be in their infancy, their youth, or maturity . . . but already we can glimpse the weakness of the “ages of man” analogy for a theory of economic growth.

After maturity must come “decline” (“declining” is the very word used by Adam Smith for an economy in negative growth), and inevitably a fate no economist would wish for. Perhaps for this reason, the analogy between economic progress and the growth of the body—whose implications seem to have been forgotten by later generations—tends to fade away in the second part of the eighteenth century, to be replaced by the much superior model of stages of socioeconomic progression—the four-stage theory—which has a completely different genealogy, and to which I will come back at the end.

Speaking of genealogy, we need at least mention, at the most abstract level, Michel Foucault’s argument for a “homology” between different fields of knowledge in the classical period, and in particular between the two disciplines that concern us here, what would soon become biology and economics.³ This learned intuition, almost fifty years before the present focus on overlapping systems of life, certainly deserves our admiration. But for Foucault, this “homology” was to be found, as he famously put it, at the “archaeological” level, where it would normally be unconscious, and any superficial resemblance (the analogies alluded to above) would merely be epiphenomena of deep structural parallels. If anything, at the surface, explicit level, each of the two nascent disciplines was conceptualizing a distinct, unique object of knowledge, incommensurable to any other: life, for what became biology, and labor, for economics. The objects of biology and science, for Foucault, were becoming more separate, less understandable or accountable in terms of each other, and therefore less promising for the bio-economic metaphor I am looking for, unless we are willing to accept his level of abstraction.

But my question is narrower, more stubborn: Beyond what are at best analogies and metonymies, can we find “economic growth” in the eighteenth century? Not only the word, but the explicit thought of the economy having its own “life,” and growing, a genuine conception in terms of economic growth?

First the word. In French, we find the verb “accroître” and the reflexive “s’accroître,” the adjective “croissant” and the noun “accroissement,” all denoting numerical increase, but no “croissance,” the exact equivalent of the English “growth.” And in English, increase, increasing, augmenting, multiplying, even “thriving,” a favorite of Adam Smith’s, but “growing” is not frequent. As for “growth,” the earliest use I have come across is in John

Stuart Mill's *Principles* (first edition 1848), and even then it still has its full literal power, so that it is not certain that it is yet really a metaphor. The competitive rat-race characteristic of early industrial development may well be necessary, but it is only, Mills says, "an incident of growth,"⁴ as we now commonly speak of growing pains.

But let us not get stuck on words. There may well be in the eighteenth century a contamination of economic thinking by biology, even an incipient conception of economic development as an organic phenomenon, without any occurrence of the metaphor that eventually prevailed.

My first cue comes from a conspicuous passage in the *Wealth of Nations*. In the chapter on the physiocrats, "Of the Agricultural Systems," Adam Smith makes explicit just such an association between medical and economic thought: "Some speculative physicians," he remarks, "seem to have imagined that the health of the human body could be preserved only by a certain precise regimen of diet and exercise," and he then adds this comment: "Mr. Quesnai [*sic*], who was himself a physician, and a very speculative physician, seems to have entertained a notion of the same kind *concerning the political body*, and to have imagined that it would thrive and prosper only under a certain precise regimen, the exact regimen of perfect liberty and perfect justice."⁵

Quesnay, the founding father of physiocracy, was indeed a medical doctor. Not only that, a good half of his work and publications during his long influential life—the first half, since he turned to economics rather later—was in the field of medicine, including his major (and aptly titled, for us) *Essai phisique sur l'oeconomie animale / Physical Essay on Animal Economy* (1747). If any connections were ever made between these two fields at the time, where are we more likely to find them, or to find them more explicitly stated, than in the writings of Quesnay?

As we can imagine, Adam Smith was not the last, and not even the first, to raise the question (though in his case only implicitly), and parallels have been perceived at all levels of generalization between Quesnay's medical and economic thought. Du Pont de Nemours, in his edition of Quesnay's *Physiocracy* of 1768–69, goes so far as to state (using an organic metaphor) that "all his works are intimately connected, and form a complete whole, like the roots, the branches and the leaves of a sturdy and prolific tree,"⁶ to be outdone only by Mirabeau in his funeral eulogy of their common master: "He

[Quesnay] discovered in medicine the animal economy, in metaphysics the moral economy, and in agriculture the political economy.”⁷ But what exactly does this interconnection consist in?

Auguste Oncken, who published the first complete works of Quesnay in 1888, takes great pains to find common ground between the medical and the economic works. When pushed to identify the notions “dominant in the future physiocratic system” that were already present in the *Physical Essay* of 1747, he only comes up with “natural order” and (more surprisingly) “natural law” (*droit naturel*).⁸ To be sure, the physiocratic school always insisted that in its economic system it was merely exposing the objective, self-evident, and universal principles, or laws, of the natural social order, just as natural philosophy was exposing those of the physical world (or physiology the system of life).⁹ Although it was apparently not Quesnay’s own invention, the name of the science itself, “physiocracy,” is after all obviously coined on the doctor’s original field of physiology. But these general principles are practically identical with those of the Enlightenment project as a whole and could be seen as a common ground for almost any “philosophical” proposition of the time.

A little more specifically, Oncken also emphasizes the notion of *liberté*, freedom, or as it has become known in the field of economics, of *laissez-faire*, as a constant principle in Quesnay’s thought. Now, while there is some question as to who among them first used the expression, there can be no doubt as to the commitment of the physiocratic sect to *laissez-faire*. They invented it and became its most ardent promoters in economic theory as well as practical policy. The burden of proof, in this case, would seem to be on the side of medicine. What does it mean to favor *laissez-faire* in medical practice? To be sure, there was a healthy tradition of medical *laissez-faire* in French thought, from Montaigne to Molière, to mention only notorious examples, but it was against medicine altogether. And yet there is something to Oncken’s assertion. Quesnay the doctor was particularly interested in the theory of fevers, and in the commonly established treatment by bloodletting (*la saignée*). He even wrote a massive tome on the question (*Traité des effets et de l’usage de la saignée* [1750]), and in this work he criticizes the excessive practice of bloodletting, on the ground that in many cases it is best to let the “curative power of nature”¹⁰ take its course. In medicine also, Quesnay argued even before he became

involved in economics, it was sometimes a better prescription to *laissez faire* nature.¹¹

As evidence for the interconnection between Quesnay's biological and economic thought, this is not extraordinarily strong, and it leaves us far from any notion of growth, but it is something. And especially, it is on to something, for the bloody track does in fact lead us to the most compelling analogy in Quesnay's thought, that of circulation, and not only of the blood.

Quesnay is most famous—and certainly was most famous in the eighteenth century—as the inventor of the *Tableau économique*, for which he was extravagantly praised by his disciples: the greatest invention since writing, some incredibly claimed.¹² For those who have not seen any of the several versions of it produced at the time, the *Tableau* (incidentally not a table in the sense that for Foucault characterized the classical épistémè, but more like a graphic chart), is a visual representation of the flow of income, or production, as it passes from one class of economic agents to another, on down to the end of the national annual cycle of production and consumption. Lines or arrows represent the movement of income as it passes from the agricultural producers to the landlords, artisans, and commercial or administrative classes, and back from each class in various proportions to the agricultural producers and artisans for the consumption of various goods and services, and finally from the landlords back to the farmers as the necessary advance for the next cycle's production.

Even if we knew nothing about Quesnay, we would undoubtedly recognize, as Quesnay's contemporaries already did, that this is a representation of circulation, and we may well also perceive a certain resemblance with the circulation of the blood in the human body, as some of his contemporaries also did. We should remember that by the time the *Tableau* began to be widely known, William Harvey's book on the circulation of the blood (*Motu Cordis et Sanguinis* [1628]) was well over a hundred years old, and therefore well known in educated circles. It should also be noted that the metaphor of money as the blood of the political body was even older, and that it was certainly already used in the seventeenth century, notably quite explicitly by Hobbes.¹³ But with Quesnay, it is no mere metaphor. As we have already seen, he had long focused on the study of blood. In addition to the important treatise on bloodletting and circulation, a major part of his *Essay on Animal Oeconomy* was also devoted to the same subject. He was, we would now

say, a recognized specialist in the circulation of the blood, and still writing about it as he was elaborating his graphic representation of the circulation of money. It is simply impossible not to think—even someone as hardheaded and unimpressible as Schumpeter could not resist—that the one gave Quesnay the idea of the other, and even served as a model for it. But how much? Because Quesnay himself, rather astonishingly, never said anything about the connection,¹⁴ we are left to make our own assessment.

The *Tableau économique* bears a strong analogy to the circulation of blood in the body, yet it is not strictly analogous to it. It is, rather, a transposition. Although fulfilling the same function, the lines joining the different “organs” of society do not look like the cardiovascular system. Although there is a point of origin to which all the “blood” of the nation eventually returns, there is not really any center to the system, not anything that we could clearly identify as a heart.¹⁵ And although the flow of income can be traced both to and from all the parts of the body, there is nothing like the distinction between arteries and veins, or between red and blue blood (money has no color). Yet in both cases Quesnay describes a total system in which all the different parts are functionally interdependent and interactive, and in which circulation or distribution is kept going by a self-perpetuating and renewing circular motion. If the tableau is not a biological analog, it does suggest a view of the economy as an organic whole, and even endowed—if we accept some metaphorical looseness—with a life of its own. That is not bad.

But there is a more precise, and perhaps more telling, analogy between the two. In his writings on physiology, whether he is concentrating on the quality of the blood itself, steeped in a colorful if (it seems to a nonspecialist) traditional theory of humors, or on the mechanics and dynamics of circulation itself, with equally colorful explanations in terms of springs and elasticity, Quesnay is consistently concerned with the regularity and mobility of flow, with pressure and the constancy of movement through the system. Conversely, he warns against the harmful effects of anything that could slow down or impede circulation, cause stoppages and clotting of the blood. In short, as a physician, he is concerned with liquidity.

Now in his economic thought, it is striking that unlike Adam Smith and even his sometime disciple Turgot, Quesnay was not an advocate of saving, of the accumulation of the stock of money, as a means of promoting growth. He held on the contrary that for the economy to be healthy, income and

profits should be poured back promptly into the system, that wealth should be kept constantly circulating. Conversely, he warned against the deleterious effects of hoarding, of unspent stocks that would slow down the economic process. In short, as an economist, he was concerned with gluts. Whether this is enough to make him, in this regard, an early Malthusian, or even a proto-Keynesian,¹⁶ we need not decide, but as an example of analogical thinking it is remarkable. What Quesnay seems to show here is not only that in his mind there is a functional homology between the biological body and the economic system, but that both are prone to the same ailments, and could therefore be helped by the same regimen. From the health and pathology of the one, he is inferring (by what deliberate or unconscious process we do not know) a prescription for the optimal efficiency, if not health, of the other. That is pretty impressive.

And yet, as we have seen, the economy pictured by the *Tableau économique* has no heart. Even more crucially for my original question, it does not grow. It is indeed striking that for all the circulation and dynamism emphasized by Quesnay, what he has described is an economy in static equilibrium. The total income and advance that come back to the farmers at the end of the cycle (five million pounds in Quesnay's example of the French realm) are exactly the same as what they had produced at the beginning. It would seem that with his idea of the net, or surplus product, of agriculture, Quesnay could have constructed a system of dynamic equilibrium, or economic growth, but he did not.¹⁷ And that, we have to think, is (paradoxically) precisely *because* he is still wrapped up in a biological model: that of the annual cycle of vegetable life through the seasons, the natural process of self-same reproduction. There is life, we might conclude, but there is no growth in Quesnay's economy.

Still, I don't want to end this discussion of Quesnay on such a negative note, and I would like to briefly suggest a contrarian reading. If Quesnay is relatively famous for the *Tableau économique*, he and the physiocrats were most infamous for their view that only the agricultural sector is productive. All other classes, not only administrators or the leisure classes, but all artisans and manufacturers and tradespeople, were, as they said, sterile. Now there are two aspects to this controversial statement, the word *sterile* itself, and the substance of the argument.¹⁸ The choice of word was evidently unfortunate. The physiocrats did not mean that the other classes were useless,

but no matter how much they tried to correct the bad impression created by the word, *sterile* stuck, and gave then no end of grief. What they did mean was that only agriculture, the work of the land, was capable of delivering a net product, in excess of the labor and capital put into it, because of the natural productivity of the land itself. Since other economic activities could only transform the product of the land or distribute it, without adding to it, they were therefore unproductive, sterile. The physiocrats were also taken to task for that substantial argument by almost everyone else, and from the perspective of any modern theory of value, they were wrong. Any economic activity that adds utility produces value; it is productive. This is true. But if we think biologically, or to use a more modern word, ecologically, there is something more to be said, and perhaps some reason to begin a rehabilitation of the physiocrats.

The word itself, *sterile*, was a bad choice, except when we start thinking of its opposite not in the economic but in the biological realm: not merely productive, but fertile. In Quesnay's mind, it is a question of *fecundity* versus sterility, the recognition of the unique reproductive power of life, of biopower itself. With this concept, we are in fact very close to identifying economic growth with growth *tout court*.¹⁹ It is true that in Quesnay's world, the most pervasive manifestation of this power, and the almost exclusive basis of economic activity, was indeed agricultural production: the growth of cultivated plants, forests, and the reproduction of domesticated animals, for power, aside from human and animal power itself, economic activity depended almost exclusively on what we now call renewable energies: primarily wood, wind, and water flows, all ultimately driven by the present-time energy of the sun. Incidentally (or not so incidentally) this is the reason why apart from the artificial disruptions brought about by wars and colonial conquest, economic growth was for centuries essentially flat or very slow. But we, who are in the advanced stages (I am not prepared to say final, for it is a very complicated question) of the most extraordinary outburst of growth in the history of humanity, know something else: that it is possible for modern economies to use past as well as present biopower, and that it is precisely this capacity that has allowed us to be so spectacularly successful. For there is no question that the utterly unprecedented period of growth we have known in the last two hundred years or so has been possible only because we have learned to tap into the energy accumulated from millions of years

of biological production on the planet, the remnants of long-ago living plants and trees we call fossil energy. We are living high on past biopower. Of course, Quesnay, who could not quite decide whether mines should be considered productive, could never have imagined such a spectacular development. And yet I think we should find in the very miracle he could not foresee a kind of vindication of the physiocratic heresy. Of course, agriculture is not the only productive sector of the economy, and of course, there are other factors of economic growth. But in the end only the land, the earth, the biosphere are truly fertile, and the only source of economic growth is biological growth itself,²⁰ as long as it lasts—a lesson we had better take to heart.

For the remainder of this essay I return to Adam Smith, who not only set us on this path, but can be presumed to offer a model of economic growth, biological or not. First, to finish the thought that led us to Quesnay, and therefore the tacit dialogue that was initiated between them: Quesnay, Smith continues where we left off, “seems not to have considered that in the political body, the natural effort which every man is continually making to better his own condition, is a principle of conservation capable of preventing and correcting, in many respects, the bad effects of a political oeconomy, in some degree, both partial and oppressive.” And he concludes the paragraph with: “In the political body . . . the wisdom of nature has fortunately made ample provision for remedying many of the bad effects of the folly and injustice of man; in the same manner as it has done in the natural body, for remedying those of his sloth and intemperance.”²¹ And so, while Smith expresses at no point any reservation about the analogy he borrows from Quesnay—on the contrary, he extends the human body/political body parallel even further—he ends up turning it against Quesnay (I think unjustly; Quesnay had in fact “considered”). In this case, it is of no great consequence, just an instance, if I may venture this, of *laissez faire* *than thou*. But it may be revealing of an interesting pattern in the relation between Smith and the physiocrats, and of a much more substantial difference.

Smith had begun with high praise for the physiocratic system as “the nearest approximation to the truth that has yet been published on the subject of political oeconomy.”²² When it comes to the central claim of the French economists, however, that only the agricultural sector is a source of net product, he expresses the most complete disagreement, as we would indeed expect from someone who believes that it is labor that produces value.

And of course, once again, he was right. Yet there is something surprising about this outright rejection of the physiocratic claim, because in fact, if we pay close attention to Smith's own pronouncements on the subject of agriculture, we must end up with the conclusion that on the specific point of the unique productivity of land, he agrees with the physiocrats. It is not just that Smith too had a particular fondness for "the pleasures of country life" and that "to cultivate the ground" was for him "the original destination of man,"²³ but that, as he puts it: "In agriculture too nature *labours along with man*,"²⁴ a direct translation in labor-value terms of the physiocratic argument. Or again that "land, in almost any situation, produces a greater quantity of food than what is sufficient to maintain all the labour necessary to bring it to market," and "the surplus too is always more than sufficient to replace the stock which employed that labor, together with its profits,"²⁵ which is exactly the point the physiocrats insisted on making.

Then why the fundamental disagreement? I think the answer to this question will put us back on the path to growth. For Smith, as is well known, the specifically economic factor, or determinant, of what we call economic growth is the division of labor. And if he recognizes, like the physiocrats, that agriculture is unique because naturally productive, he also believes that agriculture is "less subject to the division of labour," and that it has therefore "not improved as much in productivity" and "not kept up with the progress of the other arts."²⁶ Here we have perhaps the key to what was not quite formulated by Quesnay, but accounts for the nonrepresentability of growth in the *Tableau économique*. It is precisely because the unique productivity of agriculture is bound to the land, to nature, to biology, that it is also not infinitely expandable, that its growth—its economic, as opposed to its biological, growth—is subject to limits.²⁷ Adam Smith is not even close to formulating this, as others would in the next century, as the law of diminishing returns and the theory of rent, but with his own concepts, he is reaching the same conclusion when claiming that agriculture is "less subject to the division of labour." It can only grow so far because it is subjected to the law of biological growth. Hence perhaps the reverse if unstated corollary that economic growth is only sustainable when it is not natural. What this is beginning to suggest is the separation, the severance, perhaps even the incommensurability, of economic and biological growth.

Certainly, no one I know has ever suggested that the division of labor is biological. But to be really thorough, we should at this point examine all the quasi-biological instincts or inclinations that are pervasive in Adam Smith's thought, and among his most famous concepts. The division of labor, as is well known, is the "consequence of a certain propensity in human nature . . . the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another."²⁸ But by Smith's own admission, this may not be a truly primary drive, or as he puts it, "one of those original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given," but rather something that could be derived from more primal instincts. And indeed, as is even more famous, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest."²⁹ Or even more instinctively, from "the desire of bettering our condition, a desire which," he says, "comes with us from the womb, and never leaves us till we go to the grave,"³⁰ although we can still be left with a suspicion that "bettering our condition" is far too vague, too relative, too socially dependent a principle to be truly biological. And then, as all thoughtful students of Smith have come to realize, there is, in addition to these self-regarding inclinations, the other-regarding principle so finely analyzed in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that Smith calls *sympathy*. Taken together (but it is a question whether they ever add up to a cohesive system in Smith's thought), these different propensities would certainly provide a much better and richer account of how human beings really function than the single-minded "*intérêt particulier*" (self-interest) promoted by the physiocrats and most of their French contemporaries (only Rousseau offers an equally complex balance between "*amour de soi*" and his equivalent to Smith's sympathy, which he calls *pitié*). For us, the question would be whether such a system—to the extent that it forms a system—could be understood as a virtual, or as I suggested earlier, a quasi-biological force or entity motivating human agents: a supra-human principle of economic progress that is nevertheless immanent, only active at the level of each individual, and that may be what Smith designated by the elusive figure of the invisible hand, as well as, only once it seems, by the even more encompassing expression of "the economy of nature."³¹

This question, in one form or another, has exercised the sagacity and imagination of countless Smithian scholars, going back all the way to the Adam Smith problem.³² It is an endlessly fascinating subject that I never-

theless won't go further into, not only for lack of time, and more positively because in these very pages Catherine Packham does it much better justice than I ever could,³³ but also because I think that in Smith's thought, outside of the purely economic mechanism of the division of labor, the fundamental engine of growth is not fundamentally psychological, or even biological, but sociological, or more exactly anthropological. Smith's theory of growth is grounded in the conjectural history of social evolution that the historian of ideas Ronald Meek first identified as the Four Stage Theory,³⁴ and it is particularly in Smith's version of the fourth and final stage that I see the decisive argument for the separation between biological and economic growth.

The classic version of the theory, first formulated in its mature form by both Smith and Turgot, is familiar to everyone, since it has become the matrix of all histories of progress. According to this universal scheme, all the different peoples of the earth must pass (have already passed or will at some time pass) in the same order through the same stages of development defined by a specific mode of subsistence. In Smith's language, first the Age of Hunters (what we call hunting and gathering or foraging), second the Age of Shepherds (pastoralism), third agriculture, and fourth and last what he calls Commerce. Now the first three stages are clearly modes of subsistence, what would later be called modes of production. This is every bit as much as Marx's a materialist theory of history. And we can now recognize that all the first three stages are based on what the physiocrats called land, albeit with increasing applications and divisions of labor. And for this very reason of their natural and biological base, each must in turn be superseded because it is inherently finite, limited in its productive capacity. Even agriculture, the most productive of the three, will eventually reach its limit, the limit of natural production with limited opportunities for the division of labor. The first three stages will grow only as much as nature grows, because they are ultimately governed by biological growth.

But the last stage, Commerce, is not a mode of production like the others³⁵ (we would instead think of the age of Industry, but that is not what Smith is saying).³⁶ In fact, it is not really a stage of material production at all, but rather of self-reproduction, or multiplication, indeed of growth—the growth of wealth itself through exchange and investment. What Smith and Turgot are discovering is the miraculous capacity of what we now call capitalism to

make wealth produce more wealth, to make wealth reproduce itself and then more, to grow indefinitely. But this potentially infinite growth can only be dreamed of by freeing the economy from the limits of natural, or biological growth, indeed by dematerializing the economy. Despite all the suggestive analogies and potential metaphoricity offered by the model of biology in the eighteenth century, economic growth can then only be thought, and especially conceived of as infinite, through a transcendence of biological growth.

To be sure, Adam Smith himself was a most reluctant advocate for such transcendence, and at best an unconscious prophet of how it would really unfold. For one thing, as we have already emphasized, he was just as insistent as the physiocrats on seeing agriculture as the foundation of the economy, as indeed it still largely was in their lifetime. And just as Malthus and Ricardo after him, he recognized agricultural production as the ultimate limitational factor of growth.³⁷ As long as we focus on the physical limits of land, we are justified in classifying Adam Smith, as many prominent scholars do,³⁸ among the classical pessimists, and in seeing his system ineluctably (if only eventually) lead to a gloomy stationary state. And yet in all of the very few (only two or three depending on how one counts) and often discussed passages of the *Wealth of Nations* in which the possibility of an economy reaching the end of growth is evoked—in each case Smith uses the same exact phrase of a country “having reached that full complement of riches which . . .”—the end of the sentence seems to offer an escape clause to the inevitability and absoluteness of limits. In the first of two passages specifically about China, the suggestion is that “it had perhaps, long before [Marco Polo’s] time, acquired that full complement of riches which *the nature of its laws and institutions permits it to acquire*.”³⁹ In the second, nearly identical passage: “China seems to have been long stationary, and had probably long ago acquired that full complement of riches which *is consistent with the nature of its laws and institutions*.” And Smith adds, insisting on the relativity of limits: “But this complement maybe much inferior, to what, with other laws and institutions, the nature of its soil, climate, and situation might admit of.” Even in the most apparently uncompromising and general formulation, in the paragraph just preceding the second China example, Smith speculates about “a country which had acquired the full complement of riches which the nature of its soil and climate, *and its situation with respect to other countries* allowed it to acquire.”⁴⁰

Thus the limits to growth always appear to be, for a long time to come anyway, conditioned by human and institutional factors rather than physical ones; primarily, for Smith, by lack of opportunities or freedom to trade, to exchange, and, as is clearly suggested in the last of the quotations above, to engage in international commerce. For the key to growth remains the division of labor, and the division of labor, in turn, famously depends on the extent of the market.⁴¹

This applies even to agriculture, the least dividable and extendable sector. When it comes to demand for other commodities, it would seem that there are for Smith no limits at all: “The desire of food is limited in every man by the narrow capacity of the human stomach; but the desire for conveniences and ornaments of building, dress, equipage, and household furniture, seems to have no limits or certain boundary.”⁴² It is true that it is only here a question of demand, not production and supply. But if Smith did conceive of a distant Malthusian future in which agricultural production might not keep up with the needs of an increasing population, there is no evidence that he imagined reaching such a limit for other primary resources and materials, let alone energy.⁴³ And indeed, given the largely pre-industrial and low-energy economy that was his horizon, with manufacturing and travel still dependent on animal, water, or wind power, and the bare beginnings of fossil fuel exploitation, he could not possibly have dreamed of a level of human activity that would exhaust the physical resources of the whole world. His limits, and the means he proposed to overcome them, were not material, but human. What is all the more impressive is that, without being able to foresee the technological and industrial advances and the fuels that would make a seemingly indefinite growth possible, he was discerning enough to identify with such accuracy the theoretical principles and the sociohistorical developments—essentially those of market capitalism—on which it would be based.⁴⁴

But this does not mean—and this is the last paradox—that he wholly welcomed them. It isn’t just that he was inclined to favor agriculture and tended to distrust the entrepreneurs, traders, and speculators who were the drivers of the new commercial economy, but that there was for him something theoretically wrong, and perhaps even morally and metaphysically offensive, about the particular course of progress that had led to the recent wealth of nations. For Smith believed, no less than the physiocrats, in a

natural order of progress, or as he puts it, a “natural course of things.”⁴⁵ According to this normative order, as an economy matured through the last of the four stages of development, that of “commerce,” its sectoral progression (Smith’s theory is much like our modern version based on the successive dominance of the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors) ought to reflect in its chronology the natural hierarchy and relative productivity of each mode of wealth creation: “According to the natural course of things, therefore, the greater part of the capital of every growing country is, first, directed to agriculture, afterwards to manufactures, and last of all to foreign commerce.”⁴⁶ We could even at the end introduce a further subdivision between, first, domestic, and last foreign commerce. Thus as Vivienne Brown has observed, there is in Smith’s thought a certain homology between stadial progression and sectoral development,⁴⁷ the latter replicating within a single stage, with a forward displacement or skipping over the first three, the progressive logic of the stadial theory. We might even say, with some analogical recklessness, that in economic life sectoral development repeats stadial progress in the same way ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny in biological life itself. Or so it ought to. And indeed Adam Smith immediately adds, somewhat hopefully: “This order of things is so very natural, that in every society that had any territory, it has always, I believe, been in some degree observed.”⁴⁸

Nonetheless, in the much admired historical analysis that follows in the next three chapters of book 3, Smith will demonstrate in great detail how in all the countries of Europe after the fall of the Roman empire—the very birthplace and time of Western modernity and capitalism—this natural order has been “in many respects, entirely reversed.”⁴⁹ As a result of a complex combination of cultural and historical factors—the feudal system of land tenure that discouraged agricultural improvement on the part of both the great proprietors and their indentured tenants, and the ability of city dwellers (burghers) to take advantage of power struggles between rising monarchs and the great lords to gain civic and commercial freedom, including access to international markets—trade and manufacture were developed first.⁵⁰ “The foreign commerce of some of their cities has introduced all their finer manufactures, or such as were fit for distant sale; and manufactures and foreign commerce together, have given birth to the principal improvements of agriculture.”⁵¹ This, from the point of view of the natural

order, is the cart before the horse, or as Smith puts it near the end of his exposition: "It is thus that through the greater part of Europe the commerce and manufactures of cities, instead of being the effect, has been the cause and occasion of the improvement and cultivation of the country."⁵² "The manner and customs which the nature of their original government introduced," Smith recognizes in conclusion, "necessarily forced [all the states of modern Europe] into this unnatural and retrograde order."⁵³

Now it is worth recalling that "all the states of modern Europe" are not only Smith's primary interest in his inquiry into the wealth of nations, but his very model and in fact his only fully realized exemplar of the fourth, commercial stage. That all the observed cases of a modern, successfully growing economy are found to have followed an "unnatural and retrograde order" (the only example Smith can give of a normal order of development is that of the exceptional situation of the American colonies) should cause some serious questioning of the naturalness of order itself, but with respect to our original quest it can lead to only one conclusion: There is economic growth in the eighteenth century, but it is not natural.

NOTES

1. See, among other contributions, Justin Stagl, "Les sources de l'*Essai sur le principe de la population*," in *Malthus hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1984), 159–65.

2. On this point see Carol Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Jacqueline Hecht, "From 'Be Fruitful and Multiply' to Family Planning: The Enlightenment Transition," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4 (1999): 536–51; and Catherine Gallagher, "The Body versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 83–106.

3. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Random House, 1970); *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

4. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), 748.

5. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 2:674; my emphasis.

6. François Quesnay, *Physiocratie, ou Constitution naturelle du gouvernement le plus avantageux au genre humain*, recueil publié par Du Pont, Merlin (Leyde, 1768–69), 101–2; my translation.

7. Victor de Riqueti, Marquis de Mirabeau, “Eloge funèbre de François Quesnay,” pronounced on December 1774, first published in *Nouvelles Ephémérides Economiques*, January 1775, quoted in *Oeuvres économiques et philosophiques de F. Quesnay, publiées avec une introduction et des notes par Auguste Oncken* (Frankfurt: Joseph Baer et Cie; Paris: Jules Peelman et Cie, 1888), 9; my translation.

8. Quesnay, *Oeuvres*, 747.

9. In addition to more specific references below, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976; Catherine Larrère, *L'invention de l'économie au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Léviathan, PUF, 1992); and Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique, XVII–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1992).

10. Quesnay, *Oeuvres*, 739.

11. In this context see Albrecht Koschorke, “Physiological Self-Regulation: The Eighteenth-Century Modernization of the Human Body,” *MLN* 123, no. 3 (2008): 469–84.

12. Similarly, Mirabeau, referring to Quesnay as “the venerable Confucius of Europe,” claimed that the discovery of the net product “will one day change the face of the world.” *Correspondance Générale de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 17:171–72, quoted by Ronald L. Meek in *The Economics of Physiocracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), 19.

13. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 24, “Of the Nutrition, and Procreation of a Commonwealth.”

14. The closest we have to a direct acknowledgment is a passage from *Philosophie rurale*, a book coauthored by Quesnay and Mirabeau, but according to Walter Eltis, it is not in a part written by Quesnay himself. “François Quesnay: A Reinterpretation 1. The Tableau Economique,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 27, no. 2 (1975): 184.

15. H. Spencer Banzhaf shows that even in Quesnay’s physiological theory, circulation is not primarily caused by the heart, but by the pressure of air entering through the lungs, thus providing, in a further parallel with the role of the net product in the economy, an exogenous explanation for the dynamic of the system. See “Productive Nature and the Net Product: Quesnay’s Economic Animal and Political,” *History of Political Economy* 32, no. 3 (2000): 517–51.

16. This filiation is explicitly recognized by Ronald Meek, *Economics of Physiocracy*, in the third of his critical essays: “Physiocracy and the Early Theories of Under-Consumption.”

17. More accurately, he did not represent such a system in each separate tableau. In order to account for growth or decline, Quesnay produced a succession of tableaus in different states of stationary equilibrium, inventing a method of analysis Walter Eltis describes as comparative statics in "François Quesnay: A Reinterpretation 2. The Theory of Economic Growth," *Oxford Economic Papers*, n.s., 27, no. 3 (1975): 327–51.

18. See Gianni Vaggi, *The Economics of François Quesnay* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987).

19. On this point, see Stephen Gudeman, "Physiocracy: A Natural Economics," *American Ethnologist* 7, no. 2 (1980): 240–58.

20. See Margaret Schabas, "Nature Does Nothing in Vain," *Daedalus* 137, no. 2 (2008): 71–79. William D. Nordhaus goes so far as to suggest that "perhaps [Quesnay] could be called the patron saint of 'deep ecology.'" See "The Ecology of Markets," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 89, no. 3 (1992): 844. I would also like to recognize the pioneering insights of Herman E. Daly in this area, as early as "On Economics as a Life Science," *Journal of Political Economy* 76, no. 3 (1968): 392–406.

21. Smith, *Inquiry*, 2:674.

22. *Ibid.*, 2:673.

23. *Ibid.*, 1:378.

24. *Ibid.*, 1:363, my emphasis.

25. *Ibid.*, 1:162–63.

26. *Ibid.*, 1:16.

27. On this point, see Ted Benton, "Adam Smith and the Limits to Growth," in *Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 144–70.

28. Smith, *Inquiry*, 1:25.

29. *Ibid.*, 1:26.

30. *Ibid.*, 1:341.

31. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 77.

32. Even among what we might call the orthodox Smithian scholars, the question of whether Smith's thought constitutes a coherent system has not met with unanimity. While A. L. Macfie (*The Individual in Society* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967]), D. D. Raphael ("Adam Smith 1790: The Man Recalled, the Philosopher Revived," in *Adam Smith Reviewed*, ed. Peter Jones and Andrew S. Skinner [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992], 93–118), and Donald Winch (*Adam Smith's Politics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978]), among many others, argue for consistency, Jacob Viner ("Adam Smith and Laissez Faire," in *Adam Smith, 1776–1926* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928], 116–55) had long taken the opposite

position. Among more recent interpreters, such as Vivienne Brown (*Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience* [London: Routledge, 1994]), Jeffrey Young (*Economics as a Moral Science: The Political Economy of Adam Smith* [Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1997]), and Emma Rothschild (*Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001]), the answer may be more nuanced, but the situation of the enduring debate is perhaps best assessed by Marc Blaug: "Despite the efforts of the editors of the Glasgow edition to lay to rest the Adam Smith problem . . . the problem refuses to go away and rears its ugly head in every other paper in the Adam Smith industry" ("No History of Ideas, Please, We're Economists," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 15, no. 1 [2001]: 145–64).

33. See also Catherine Packham, "The Physiology of Political Economy: Vitalism in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 3 (2002): 465–81.

34. See Ronald Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

35. On this point, see Itsvan Hont, "The Language of Sociability and Commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the Theoretical Foundations of the 'Four-Stages Theory,'" in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 253–76.

36. There has been some debate as to how much Adam Smith was aware of the beginnings and potential of the industrial revolution he was witnessing. The prevailing verdict is that, somewhat surprisingly for a contemporary and sometimes neighbor of such pioneering figures as Wilkinson, Arkwright, Boulton, and Watt, his vision did not take him much further than small-scale manufacturing. See R. Koebner, "Adam Smith and the Industrial Revolution," *Economic History Review* 11, no. 3 (1959): 381–91. Also Hiram Caton, "The Preindustrial Economy of Adam Smith," *Journal of Economic History* 45, no. 4 (1985): 833–53.

37. Joseph J. Spengler, "Adam Smith on Population Growth and Economic Development," *Population and Development Review* 2, no. 2 (1976): 167–80.

38. Notably W. A. Eltis, "Adam Smith's Theory of Economic Growth," and Robert L. Heilbroner, "The Paradox of Progress: Decline and Decay in *The Wealth of Nations*," both in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 426–54, 524–39.

39. Smith, *Inquiry*, 1:89, my emphasis.

40. *Ibid.*, 111–12, my emphasis.

41. Marian Bowley argues that although Smith begins by viewing the division of labor as the key component of economic growth, he slowly

progresses to recognize the accumulation of capital as a necessary condition, and finally sees it as the more fundamental factor of growth. See “Some Aspects of the Treatment of Capital in *The Wealth of Nations*,” in Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 285.

42. Smith, *Inquiry*, 1:164.

43. See E. A. Wrigley, “Energy and the English Industrial Revolution,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 371, no. 1986 (2013): n.p.

44. On Adam Smith’s theory of growth, see also Adolph Lowe, “Adam Smith’s System of Equilibrium Growth,” in Skinner and Wilson, *Essays on Adam Smith*, 423–24; David A. Reisman, *Adam Smith’s Sociological Economics* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), and Spengler, “Adam Smith on Population Growth.”

45. For a good discussion of sectoral progression, see Paul Bowles, “Adam Smith and the ‘Natural Progress of Opulence,’” *Economica* 53, no. 209 (1986): 109–18.

46. Smith, *Inquiry*, 1:380.

47. Brown, *Adam Smith’s Discourse*, 177.

48. Smith, *Inquiry*, 1:380.

49. Ibid.

50. Noel Parker, “Look, No Hidden Hands: How Smith Understands Historical Progress and Social Values,” in Copley and Sutherland, *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations*, 123–29.

51. Smith, *Inquiry*, 1:380.

52. Ibid., 422.

53. Ibid., 380.

T W O

An African Diasporic Critique of Violence

James Edward Ford III

I argue for making the “critique of violence” a general intellectual heading in the black radical tradition. Doing so makes apparent the neglected intellectual, artistic, and activist expressions in that tradition while elucidating its convergences and divergences with Enlightenment political, aesthetic, and ethical thought. Paradoxically, Walter Benjamin’s turn to “European conditions” in his famous essay “Critique of Violence” stops him from looking squarely at European conditions, seeing that this supernationality must be understood by its (self-) destructive imperial effects in the colonies and beyond.¹ As Aimé Césaire argues persuasively in *Discourse on Colonialism*, the violence in Europe motivating Benjamin’s essay is merely Europe’s application of colonial methods upon itself. In altering the geography of the critique of violence, I stage an encounter between Walter Benjamin, Phillis Wheatley, and, perhaps surprisingly, Immanuel Kant. Benjamin’s readers may recall that the Niobe legend allows him to conceptualize mythic violence, which induces guilt in those it targets to bind them emotionally,

materially, and mentally to the Law. Wheatley's more attentive readers will know of the Niobe legend from her still understudied epyllion, "Niobe in Distress for Her Children Slain by Apollo, from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Book VI. And from a view of the Painting of Mr Richard Wilson." Whereas Benjamin reads Niobe's legend as complete acquiescence to mythic violence, Wheatley, over a century earlier after viewing Wilson's *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe* (1760), recasts the legend as Niobe's refusal to submit. Consequently, Wheatley's poem inaugurates a study of resistance to mythic violence that Benjamin was unable to conceptualize. Wheatley's rendering of a Niobe who refuses guilt, placed in a broader eighteenth-century context, counters her contemporary and Benjamin's implied target of his critique of violence, namely, Kant's political writings.

This essay has three stages: I begin by speculating on how and why Wheatley criticism has failed to capture the most radical aspects of Wheatley's writing and, in its most famous expression, reduces "the primal scene of African American letters" to a fantastical interrogation of Wheatley's literary merits. Then, I question the transcendental subjectivity epitomizing and misrecognizing European conditions in relation to the colonial conquest Wheatley describes in "Niobe." These two stages of the argument displace well-worn interpretations of Wheatley's work and reveal the illusoriness of "European Man's" justifications for the law-founding violence justifying capitalism, colonialism, and slavery, most compellingly elucidated in Kant's moral-philosophical writings. These stages clear a path for tracing how Wheatley's poetry anticipates and counters this Eurocentric discourse. In the third stage of the essay I offer a close reading of Wheatley's poem in relation to Wilson's painting, which exposes a different primal scene of blackness in her writing: resistance to the law-founding violence along the coasts of Africa establishing the frontiers between nation and colony, citizen and unjust enemy, autonomous subject and guilty thing, all under the signs of race and maternity.

*Disbeveling the Origins, I: "The Primal Scene
of African American Letters"*

Resituating Wheatley in contrapuntal relation to Kant and as anticipating Benjamin prompts a rethinking of what Henry Louis Gates calls the

“primal scene of African American letters.” Gates correctly claims that for several generations Wheatley has been read either as little more than being pro- or anti-black. However, to these misinterpretations Gates adds another. Gates locates the primal scene among several highly reputed Bostonians on a “panel” designed “to verify the authorship of [Wheatley’s] poems.” Only through “read[ing] her with all the resourcefulness that she brought to her craft” can we “let Phillis Wheatley take the stand” and create a space for her in a liberal multiculturalist “republic of letters.”² One could counter swiftly with Joanna Brooks’s argument that these events never occurred.³ Yet Gates’s lawyer-like defense takes for granted the very tribunal of reason that Wheatley’s writing (and the tradition it opens), at its most radical, resists. Understanding why Gates even takes such a defensive stance that reinforces literary scholarship as a tribunal of reason means taking a different argumentative path than Brooks.

Gates fails to conceptualize this specific primal scene, despite the term’s many variants in psychoanalytic thought and the black tradition’s constant “anticipatory doubling of some of the fundamental concepts of the psychoanalytic apparatus.”⁴ Conceptualizing this primal scene demands something beyond conventional Freudian or even Lacanian accounts, something more akin to Serge Leclaire’s research on primary narcissism, though even that account must be understood in light of how racialization complicates sexual differentiation. For Leclaire, the primal scene emphasizes the “constant work of a power of death—the death of a wonderful (or terrifying) child who, from generation to generation, bears witness to parents’ dreams and desires.”⁵ Leclaire concludes that “there can be no life” without “killing” this perfect image, which constantly judges real life against an impossible ideal origin. I draw on Leclaire’s concerns to question Wheatley scholarship, which is, in part, a discourse on the origins of black writing.

Yet this takes psychoanalysis beyond its conventional limits as well. Violent ungenderings of black maternity and erasures of black paternity, the literal loss of black children through slave auctions, lynchings, rapes, murders, and emotional torment complicate Leclaire’s schema. Black life also veers from the Oedipal schema by reviving, however incompletely, a *Law of the Mother* by which maternity, paternity, dis/inheritance, and tradition must be rethought.⁶ For these reasons, Leclaire’s proposal that one “kill that strange, original image [of the perfect child] in which everyone’s birth

is inscribed” cannot do. This repeats slavery and colonialism’s violence too straightforwardly. Furthermore, some births are damned by colonial powers, so there is no perfect child to do away with. Rather than kill the perfect child, perhaps one must linger in the “strange birth” of blackness in the scattering of Africa’s children, not in terms of a single historical instance, but as an overdetermined origin in dispersion gauged by its excess to any single narrative of defeat or redemption.⁷ In this nexus the implications of Wheatley’s “Niobe in Distress for Her Children Slain” for Enlightenment and Black Radical thought can be addressed in a way that is not comprehensive, but goes beyond Gates’s centrist positioning.

Gates’s argument attempts to take a centrist position in a field in which “two extremes—total accommodation and total resistance—have defined the poles between which Wheatley has vacillated,” as Russell Reising has noted.⁸ Below, Gates caricatures this issue by staging a second inquisition run by 1960s black radicals:

The critics of the Black Arts Movement . . . were a rather more hostile group than met that day in 1772. We can almost imagine Wheatley being frog-marched through another hall in the nineteen-sixties or seventies, surrounded by dashiki-clad figures of “the Revolution”: “What is Ogun’s relation to Esu?” . . . “Santeria is derived from which African culture?” And, finally, “Where you gonna be when the revolution comes, *sista*?”⁹

One leans one’s head to one side, glancing suspiciously at Gates’s suggestion that “dashiki-clad” black radicals would be more hostile to Wheatley than eighteenth-century slave owners or their apologists. Regardless, Gates’s caricature misnames the attraction and repulsion among critics desiring Wheatley to be the perfect child/mother embodying past, present, and future radicalisms. This attraction-repulsion to the perfect child-mother acts as a displacement of the imperfect, strange birth of black radicalism—a strange birth that the “Niobe” poem captures.

This anxiety over the overdetermined origin of blackness spurs critics’ oscillation between love and hate for Wheatley’s poetry. Behind it lie questions about the proper model for thinking blackness (and diaspora): Is it based on “ideologies of a real or symbolic return to Africa,” which depends on a sameness uniting the scattered children? Or is the black diaspora “a changing core of difference,” “the work of ‘differences within unity,’ an

unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed"?¹⁰ The first model sets up a seemingly uniform standard by which to judge one's cultural and political fidelity, returning the scattered children of Africa to the cradle of a coddling primary narcissism where one is the redeemed object of love and desire for those who witnessed one's birth. Anyone who challenges this self-image also betrays blackness.

In this search for restoration, some, like the famed historian Arthur Schomburg, look back to Wheatley as a loving mother to be revered—

Phillis Wheatley is a jewel—priceless to the literature of the Negro in America. Her name stands as a beacon light to illuminate the path of the young. . . . Let us with diligence weave to her memory as affectionate and loving a feeling for her sacrifice, in keeping with the manifested race pride shown in her poems, that they may stimulate us to nobler deeds and loftier purposes in life.¹¹

Others revile Wheatley for not returning affection to current readers/scattered children, as if they know she is capable of doing so. Consider James Weldon Johnson in 1922 saying, "One looks in vain [in Wheatley's poetry] for some outburst or even complaint against the bondage of [Wheatley's] people, for some agonizing cry about her native land."¹² Or Rosey E. Poole in 1964 writing that "if this ex-slave [Wheatley] . . . had the strength to give all that was really hers, and not that which others had given her, she might have become a really important figure and not, as she is now, a literary curio." Poole's passage reads quite abrasively because she assumes Wheatley *should* and *must* have had the capabilities to give more to the tradition, but withheld them. Yet others revile her for leaving unclear the origin, and, by extension, the desired redemptive telos of black culture, as Robert Hayden does in 1967: "Phillis Wheatley . . . had almost nothing to say about the plight of her people. *And if she resented her own ambiguous* position in society, she did not express her resentment."¹³ These critics share a diasporic vision of an origin for filial restoration of past, present, and future feelings of loss and dispossession. They judge Wheatley according to how she does or does not complement this model.

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars such as John Shields, Vincent Carretta, Sondra O'Neale, and Katherine C. Bassard recast Wheatley through closer attention to the nuance of her poetry and her engagement with a transat-

lantic readership.¹⁴ In the twenty-first century, scholars have continued to reframe Wheatley's poetry. Kathy Chiles reads Wheatley and Samson Occom comparatively to understand "early American processes of racialization," seeing Wheatley as conceptualizing race through her poetry, and not just an object of those processes.¹⁵ Jennifer Thorn engages Wheatley's poetry to rethink eighteenth-century feminist studies, using a model of "grief" rather than "grievance" informed by Anne Anlin Cheng's thought on racial melancholia and Hazel Carby's theorization of the relationship between (non)reproductive labor and black womanhood.¹⁶ Robert Kendrick argues that Wheatley's poems "announce pleasure for *transgression*, a needed violence of the autonomy of the laws of genre which require other author(ities) to authorize her work. Wheatley assumes a paradoxical task: to write an epic (the most legitimate and inviolable of genres) of *illegitimacy* and transgression."¹⁷ I join this new phase of Wheatley criticism taking up racialization, grief, black maternity's (non)reproductivity, and transgression because it takes seriously the second model of blackness, as a dispersed origin with a changing core of difference. In doing so, I facilitate an exploration of a primal scene of African American letters that earlier scholarship has ignored.

Tracing these themes in Wheatley's poetry requires her readers to relinquish "constructions and phantasies claiming to account unambiguously for our filiation, or, more precisely, focusing on a single point [as] the source of the force moving us."¹⁸ Wheatley's poetry triggers such powerful responses over two centuries on because in this overdetermined, so-called "single point" one finds a surplus, reconstructive drive uncontainable in conventional narratives of enslavement or revolution. This remainder explains why people cannot simply file away her poetry as traitorous to black culture. Demanding that Wheatley live up, say, to 1960s radicalisms, even beyond Gates's caricatures of that period, falls short because that literary activity is only possible historically *and* conceptually *after* Wheatley's poetic intervention. Yet even her poetry evokes an earlier birth of radicalism, and then an earlier one, *ad infinitum*, so that one must have recourse to a transcendental claim regarding blackness antedating European imperialism's mythic violence, the guilt it induces, and its philosophical justifications. I am not saying that Wheatley herself is the condition of possibility of black writing. I am saying instead that Wheatley's writing was possible due to her commitment to this condition of possibility, as a remainder to the objectification of

colonial violence, which she renders so compellingly in “Niobe” as a scene of racialization, grief, the (non)reproductivity of black maternity, and transgression that opposes and endures the making of Western civilization. The question is not whether Wheatley lives up to our radicalism, but whether we can linger, with Wheatley, in the moments when the frontiers are laid down under the pretense of a false peace scattering Africa’s imperfect children across the land and waters.

Disveiling the Origins, II: A Discourse on European Conditions

From this alternative approach within black studies, one can trace the effectiveness and limits of the expropriation of black lives, cultures, and resources taking off in the eighteenth century that, by the interwar period, return to wreak havoc on Europe as well. Walter Benjamin, like his European counterparts, fails to link Europe’s crumbling explicitly to its colonial missions. One can understand this failure by way of another interwar period writer, Hans Kelsen, in his *Pure Theory of Law*. Warren Montag calls attention to Kelsen’s critique of the legal subject, which points out that the same person who is the subject of rights—that is, “the proprietor of rights”—is also the subject of power—“the subject of obligations.”¹⁹ The proprietor has the right to “use and abuse” property without interference. However, Kelsen believes the figure of the subject of right is constantly overstated, while the subject of power is downplayed in the European context. Behind this is “a free autonomous subject who could only be a subjected being secondarily and as a consequence of an action freely undertaken by in the absence of necessity or constraint.”²⁰ Kelsen traces this back to Immanuel Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, where he argues that legal personhood depends on “imputing” actions to himself or herself. The modern legal apparatus only works if we assume the legal subject has every opportunity to make proper moral decisions, no matter the circumstances. We must impute or assume the legal subject’s absolute freedom for the legal apparatus to hold. Montag argues that modern law subjugates more effectively by persuading the subjugated of their absolute freedom.

Benjamin understates how this transcendental illusion shapes European conditions, including the liberal-democratic legal categories he explores. Benjamin sets aside the approach in the European tradition that questions

this illusion. Kelsen's approach is decidedly Spinozist in stressing the legal subject's inability to transcend its conditions. Benjamin reduces Spinoza's ante-juridicism to vulgar Darwinism and says that "natural law" is "blind" "to the contingency of means," although in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza is bent on convincing readers to take contingency seriously.²¹ Immediately after setting aside one of Europe's strongest critiques of law and transcendence, Benjamin accepts the liberal-democratic categories of law—"the positive theory of law is acceptable as a hypothetical basis at the outset of this study"—which hinders a more direct engagement with their Kantian, imperialist justification.²²

I fill this gap by dealing with the brutal underside of Kant's moral subject. Although Montag and Kelsen stress how subjugation works under the illusion of absolute autonomy, I turn to *Metaphysics of Morals* and the "the thing" which defines entities, including people, who are *not* legal subjects and how they can be treated. As I will show, the justification for deciding who is a *thing* is no less illusory than deciding who is a legal subject. Comparing Kant's distinction between "persons" and "things" with his definition of "imputation" reveals the circularity of his argument. I quote the relevant passages at length here:

An action is called a *deed* insofar as it comes under obligatory laws and . . . as the subject, in doing it, is considered in terms of the freedom of his choice. . . . The agent is regarded as the *author* of its effect, and this, together with the action itself, can be *imputed* to him. . . .

A *person* is a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him. *Moral* personality is therefore nothing other than the freedom of a rational being under moral laws. . . . From this it follows that a person is subject to no other laws than those he gives to himself (either alone or at least along with others).

A thing is that to which nothing can be imputed. Any object of free choice which itself lacks freedom, is therefore called a thing (*res corporalis*).

Then, Kant writes:

Imputation (imputatio) . . . is the *judgment* by which someone is regarded as the author (*causa libera*) of an action, which is then called a *deed (factum)* and stands under laws.²³

In an essay on Kant and blackness, Ronald Judy notes, "The harmony between phenomena and Idea is not necessary" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

“For Kant, ‘Everything happens as if’ . . . Kant holds this harmony to be merely postulated or declared.” Judy continues by noting “Kant’s extraordinary knack for generating terminology in the face of argumentative failure—failure always meant the premature closure of the argument, before arriving at the hope for conclusion.”²⁴ One finds both problems in his account of personhood, thinghood, and imputation in *Metaphysics of Morals*. Personhood depends on imputation. One cannot be author of one’s free deeds without it. But imputation requires a personhood already executing free deeds. Kant makes this circular terminological argument to hide the hubris of a transcendental subject who abides “no other laws than those he gives to himself (either alone or at least along with others).” In this “transcendent illusion,” “instead of applying itself to the Categories of the Understanding . . . Reason claims to be directly applicable to objects, and seeks to legislate in the domain of knowledge. Reason tries to have determinate knowledge of something by determining an object rather than a category.”²⁵ The “others” parenthesized here would have to share the same self-aggrandizing orientation to action and responsibility.

How does this collective orientation lead to new conclusions about how Kant conceptualizes “things”? When speaking of “things,” Kant refers to *people* to whom freedom cannot be imputed. When referring to “any *object* of free choice, which itself lacks freedom,” Kant suggests that a person (or culture) can be the object of another’s will and that this is morally justifiable. While generating the terms he will use throughout *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant offers no explanation as to *why* those “things” cannot be subjects of imputation. Since Kant himself claims that a moral philosophy without universal applicability is not worthy of the name, it is quite revealing that he would assume and assert that imputation is not universally applicable. Considering that his own theorization of Reason focuses on the refinement of categorization and warns against claiming complete mastery of an object, it is curious that he would allow such a violent evacuation of some people’s autonomy. Indeed, this ontological principle seeks an absolute imbalance of power between so-called subject and so-called thing supported by an illusory hierarchy.

The hubris of the transcendental subject depends on the unsubstantiated assertion that one population is innately human, free, and already authorized to control other populations that are innately subhuman, unfree, and

already blameworthy for any resistance they pose to the other group's wishes. Kant remains in the tradition Aristotle opens in *Politics* distinguishing the naturally free from the naturally servile *barbaroi*.²⁶ Even if some scholars suggest that Kant eventually leaves behind the uncouthness of his earlier statements on race, in this late text, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant does not abandon racism *but finds the philosophical means to systematize its application for the global expansion of Western European empires*. This systematization can only be contradictory and deserves further explanation. Kant's anthropology operates as a determinant judgment bringing all humanity under one law.²⁷ Systemization, however, refers to the dissemination of racialized ways of thinking that organize humanity under one genus and subcategories, increasingly distinguished from animality, with whiteness symbolizing its pinnacle. This system drastically subsumes, erases, or frequently conflicts with other forms of human belonging and knowing. And yet the vagaries of racialization upset the system it calls forth. If systematicity unites concepts of the understanding under an Idea, then racism necessarily purports to reach beyond the concept and identify reality as such.²⁸

Race creates quite the conundrum for Western epistemology and politics. The transcendental subject positions itself as lawgiver, adhering to no law but its own. But that law is, at the outset, compromised by race as a transcendental illusion; that lawgiver then brings other cultures under its law and illusions, at the expense of other rational traditions. In effect, no one is authorized to identify and exorcise this illusion. Consequently, the subject of Kant's critical project grants this illusion safe harbor to influence theoretical and practical philosophy. Racialization marks an impurity in pure reason. Like other forms of transcendental illusion, racialization gets mistaken for a necessary condition of Reason in particular and human progress in general, which makes any attack on this illusion tantamount to triggering an apocalypse for its adherents. A false binary arises where one either accepts the law with this illusion or rejects the law with this illusion. In regard to moral philosophy, consider Kant's most famous quotation about how the "starry heavens" above him and the "moral law" within him produce "admiration and awe." Racialization helps to pull the transcendental subject away from animality, from being a mere "speck" in the universe, transforming that subject into a "universal and necessary" "intelligence." But this law operates by withdrawing the transcendental subject from "the limitless magnitude of

worlds upon worlds, systems upon systems,” or “even of the entire world of the senses.”²⁹ For this essay’s purposes, the “systems upon systems” reference natural phenomena as well as myriad cultural, political, and intellectual perspectives and practices being brought under European power.³⁰ A strange intelligence this is, that asserts its universal necessity through a system shaped by the most arbitrary interpretations of complexion and phenotype. Yet racialization does not count as obstructing the critical project or the politics Kant derives from it, because it provides a mechanism for making imperial expansion and its violent excesses universal and necessary.

The following passage from *Metaphysics of Morals* demonstrates how such illusions make European conquest necessary:

[The seas] are . . . most favoring [Europe’s] commerce by means of navigation; and the more *coastlines* these nations have in the vicinity of one another . . . the more lively their commerce can be. However, visiting these coasts, and still more settling there to connect them with the mother country, provide the occasion for evils and acts of violence in one place on our globe to be felt all over it. Yet this possible abuse cannot annul the right of citizens of the world *to try to* establish community with all. . . . The question arises, however: In newly discovered lands, may a nation undertake to *settle (accolatus)* and take possession in the neighborhood of a people that has already settled in the region, even without its consent? If the settlement is made so far from where that people resides that there is no encroachment on anyone’s use of his land, the right to settle is not open to doubt. But if these peoples are shepherds or hunters (like the Hottentots, the Tungusi, or most of the American Indian nations) . . . this settlement may not take place by force but only by contract that does not take advantage of the ignorance of those inhabitants with respect to ceding their lands. This is true despite the fact that sufficient specious reasons to justify the use of force are available: that it is to the world’s advantage, partly because these crude peoples will become civilized.³¹

Kant uncomfortably admits the worst outcomes of his internationalist framework. When he refers to “newly discovered lands” somehow already inhabited, when he speaks of Europeans settling “far” from those inhabitants who somehow still “cede their lands,” when he criticizes “specious reasons” for “violence” though they somehow fit a “civiliz[ing]” mission benefiting the inhabitants, he uses his moral philosophy to explain away the “evils and acts of violence” brought about by European colonial expansion. Kant’s equivo-

cations do not hide that his perpetual peace requires an absolute imbalance of power between legal subjects and human beings/things brought about by perpetual war.

This international basis for economic expansion, new racial classifications, and legal presuppositions justifies the law-founding force Walter Benjamin calls mythical violence. He uses the Niobe legend to describe this violence's political function:

Mythical violence in its archetypal form is a mere manifestation of the gods. . . . The legend of Niobe contains an outstanding example of this. True, it might appear that the action of Apollo and Diana [also known as Latona, the name Wheatley prefers] is only a punishment. But their violence establishes a law far more than it punishes for the infringement of one already existing. Niobe's arrogance calls down fate upon itself not because her arrogance offends against the law but because it challenges fate—to a fight in which fate must triumph, and can bring to light a law only in its triumph. . . . Violence therefore bursts upon Niobe from the uncertain, ambiguous sphere of fate. . . . Although it brings a cruel death to Niobe's children, it stops short of the life of their mother, whom it leaves behind, more guilty than before through the death of the children, both as an eternally mute bearer of guilt and as a boundary stone on the frontier between men and gods.³²

Right after Benjamin talks about the Niobe legend he says:

For in this sphere [of constitutional law] the establishing of frontiers, the task of "peace" after all the wars of the mythical age, is the primal phenomenon of all lawmaking violence. . . . Where frontiers are decided the adversary is not simply annihilated; indeed, he is accorded rights even when the victor's superiority in power is complete. And these are, in a demonically ambiguous way, "equal" rights: for both parties to the treaty it is the same line that may not be crossed.³³

Without reading Kant's ideal subject and theory of perpetual peace regarding colonial conflict in *Metaphysics of Morals*, Benjamin's use of "frontier" reads abstractly despite its specific reference to the violence of settler colonialism and nation-building. By turning to this strand of Kant's corpus, Benjamin intuits what Césaire will compellingly explain: to understand the ominous rumblings of the interwar period one must realize that Europe has turned its colonizing tactics upon itself. Liberal democracies are founded

by turning some people into gods and others into things, through a guilt-inducing violence that convinces the latter they are always abusable. Benjamin treats the resulting “equality” circumspectly because guilt must persist in a one-sided manner for this legal-political structure to hold.

Considering that the problems and proposals Kant takes up have global reach, that Wheatley experiences the colonial expeditions Kant legitimates, and that Wheatley and Kant are exact contemporaries, I contend that this nexus of theoretical and practical concerns marks a primal scene of African American letters. From this vantage, one can view much of Wheatley’s critique of Western law, philosophy, economics, and politics while she envisions a subjectivity *within* the processes of objectification. Reading Wheatley’s “Niobe” as a poem and lens for examining her other poems touches upon the most radical strand of Wheatley’s poetic project: the refusal of the guilt induced by mythic violence, the rejection of the laws that violence founds, and an opposition to the transcendent illusion of the all-powerful Eurocentric subject.

Reading Wheatley’s “Niobe in Distress for Her Children”

Blackness is another word for the nonidentity and reconstructive drive that founds and transgresses aesthetic genres. Many have noted, with reasonable ambivalence, that John and Susannah Wheatley provided a modest classical education for Phillis Wheatley; however, they could not have taught her how to rethink these materials in relation to her specific subject position. She did that herself through her “study,” that is, an impassioned pursuit of learning exceeding any certifications signifying topical mastery and implying alternative forms of sociality.³⁴ That reconstructive drive in Wheatley’s effort persists throughout her poems, especially in regard to her inhabiting and retooling of classical writing forms, themes, and figures. As Eric Hairston notes, “Wheatley’s education followed at least in part the standards of the exclusively male Latin Grammar schools. . . . This model emphasized reading classical epics, histories, verse, and philosophy and translating between vernaculars and Latin. Their curriculum included Cato, Ovid, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Terence, Homer, Isocrates, and Xenophon.”³⁵ “In combining Christian and classical elements,” says John Shields, “Wheatley falls within a

common tradition which began before the Renaissance and extends through Eliot. But Wheatley casts her practice of such syncretism into her own mode." For Shields, Wheatley shapes her distinct mode based on cultural elements she "brought with her from her African homeland" and her masterly employment of poetic conventions "to make a structure neither wholly pagan nor wholly Christian."³⁶

Wheatley's syncretism has a political component. As Karen Dovell has noted, "Early Americans believed that the westward progression of civilization, embodied in the classical concepts of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, was destined to be carried out in America," meaning that the United States would eventually become the hegemonic global power pushing civilization forward and carrying on the tradition of classical knowledge.³⁷ Wheatley's classical studies and awareness of contemporary American revolutionary discourse fueled her decision to write on Niobe, based on this figure's place in the Classics and Wheatley's reconfiguration for her present (and ours). "Niobe, a goddess from Asia Minor, was associated in Greek mythology with the 'dark phase' of the moon, the principle of disorder and sin, the primordial mother of the human race." Indeed, the Zeus of Phidias's throne was engraved with "images of the death of Niobe's children," suggesting "the centrality of their sacrifice to the construction of a divine order in classical antiquity."³⁸ Wheatley's *translatio studii* leads her to Niobe, who prefigures Europe's pathologization of blackness to construct its social order.³⁹ Yet Wheatley's poem embraces Niobe's call to disorder discourses of her day that valorized the expansion of colonial sovereignty and knowledge production. At the same time, Wheatley confounds any tidy narrative of the founding of African American letters, making it a site of interminable analysis rather than static theses.

In Wheatley's "Niobe" the titular character enacts a great refusal (Figure 2.1). From the self-styled "gods" deploying mythic violence to silence Niobe forever to the very formatting of the poem itself by anonymous editorial hands (something I will discuss later), "Niobe" captures a speech precisely where silence should reign. This speech cannot be reduced to Wheatley "taking the stand" literally or metaphorically, first, because that grants the very legitimacy that Niobe will not give colonialist law and its philosophical justifications, and second, because the poem attends to the violence preceding legality. Not only does this point bring Wheatley closer



FIGURE 2.1. *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe*. 1760. Richard Wilson (1714–82). Yale Center for British Art. Paul Mellon Collection.

to the most intellectually, artistically, and politically astute contributors to the Black Radical tradition. One must also question any framing using preestablished juridical norms, since her writing questions the objectification resulting from the law's founding. The liberal multiculturalist reading's greatest shortcoming is that it keeps Wheatley in front of the legal tribunals poetry questions. Instead, her work must be placed in the midst of the uneven push and pull between laying and uprooting the foundations of the law (of the Father, of capitalist accumulation, etc.), not as the subject who already takes that ground for granted.

In this context, the "Niobe" poem "maintain[s] a power of refusal" that is "capable of opening up a future" that alters the relation between the non-reproductive and reproductive.⁴⁰ Granted, Wheatley's nonreproductivity, in terms of childbirth, was a key characteristic of being enslaved in New England. However, that lack of freedom does not exhaust Wheatley's own knowledge of freedom and the refusals it enacts with implications that con-

tinue today.⁴¹ Though Wheatley, like Niobe, could hypothetically affirm a certain sort of reproductivity through boasting of her (literary) progeny—being the first African American writer and being part of the first majority-female, collaborative, transatlantic publication project—it turns out that both assert power in their refusals not to reproduce certain social patterns. The merits of this relationship require further exploration. The aforementioned criticisms of Wheatley all carry the vestiges of a desire for patrilineal inheritance. *Refusing that all-too linear understanding of tradition* may be a key tenet of claiming Wheatley as cultural or artistic ancestor. Meanwhile, despite Niobe's losses, she never submits to reproducing that violence or urges her children to submit to its command. While Benjamin reads the Niobe legend to represent acquiescence, Wheatley's poem finds a *vitality* inside and outside of reproduction, in critical response to her oppressive context.

Wheatley's long title to this poem provides an intellectual trajectory for understanding her syncretic approach to Niobe. Most likely during her visit to the Earl of Dartmouth while seeking support for *Poems on Various Subjects*, Wheatley saw the 1760 version of Richard Wilson's *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe*, which captures the moment Niobe is punished by Apollo for insulting Goddess Latona. Benjamin calls his critique of mythic violence a "gaze" that steps back to see the cycle of "law-making and law-preserving formations of violence."⁴² In the 1770s, Wheatley enacts her own account of the subject-object relation through her gaze at Wilson's painting. Wheatley links the "gaze" to imagination and, in another poem, celebrates imagination "leav[ing] the rolling [as in gears rolling] universe behind." In characterizing the gaze as "silken fetters" that bind the *subject* and not the object, creating a "soft captivity" in the subject's mind rather than the object, Wheatley's gaze does not allow for the subject's blameless domination over things as Kant does in his moral philosophy.⁴³ Indeed, Wheatley's account of the relation may actually undermine the subject-object divide altogether.

Wheatley's alternative account of perception and the relation among things (as opposed to subject and object) opens an alternative understanding of the aesthetic and its framing by privileging fascination—where the purported object temporarily absorbs the gazing subject into it, indicating fuller engagement—over the sterile gaze of the Enlightenment

subject—where one’s distance from the object ensures an uneven power relation, allowing one to pathologize and therefore colonize the object. Precisely because Wheatley’s account of perception allows only for a soft captivity bound by silken fetters, one can envision how Wilson’s painting draws her into its action. At the same time, Wheatley’s poem captures how this well-bounded scene spills out onto African coastlines that Kant’s moral philosophy makes the milieu for imperial expansion. Wilson’s *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe* more effectively intimates this conflict on the coastline than, say, Jean-François de Troy’s *The Death of Niobe’s Children* (1720), Anicet-Charles-Gabriel Lemonnier’s *Apollo and Diana Attacking Niobe and Her Children* (1772), Jacques-Louis David’s *Apollo and Diana Attacking the Children of Niobe* (1772), or William Sharp’s *Niobe* (1792), an engraving of Wilson’s painting. Based on the placement of Apollo and Diana in the paintings, these other eighteenth-century artists seem to believe the gods are actually gods. The boundaries of and in the painting remain intact. The placement of Apollo and Diana/Latona in Wilson’s painting sustains the possibility that instead of gods we are viewing would-be settlers who are ambushing inhabitants to make the latter mere “things.” Against a Kantian aesthetics that would claim that the proper way of viewing the action would demand keeping Latona’s and Apollo’s violence within the parameters of the painting and restrict any turmoil to the internal dynamics of a disinterested viewer, Wheatley explores how violence against those targeted for colonization and their resistance escapes the painterly frame.

Wheatley’s poem draws her readers into what Kant would call the *Mittelglied*, but what black thinkers would call the “Middle Passage.” *Mittelglied* and “Middle Passage” both designate an “articulation of the theoretical and the practical . . . that is *neither* theoretical *nor* practical,” but *both*. “Art” thus inhabits a “place deprived of place” for both terms.⁴⁴ The undecidable, ungrounding of both terms invites judgment. However, only “middle passage” complicates judgment by locating this conflict of faculties within the putative object rather than the European subject. The middle passage most famously refers to the oceanic, catastrophic experience of being in the belly of the slave ship. Yet one need only remember Olaudah Equiano’s terror on the African coastline when he merely viewed the slave ship to understand that Wheatley was not alone in linking the slave ship and shoreline to the same law-making process. In this case, the African shorelines are part of this

middle-passage, this remixed *Mittelglied*, renewing landscape painting's function. Under Wheatley's gaze landscape painting captures the upheaval of the incomplete work of law-founding violence rather than the confirmation of preestablished ontological principles. Wheatley's poem repurposes Wilson's landscape painting so that the latter's classical imagery elucidates the frontier conflicts Kant finds unpalatable yet unavoidable in commercial expansion, since he knows that the key cargo on the coastlines is human beings and that his legal persons/things distinction justifies it.

Some have limited this poem to a lesson against hubris before the gods, seeing that the poem begins with Niobe disrupting Goddess Latona's festival. Combining Kant's claim that some humans are legal persons and others are things with the place of Apollo in Wilson's picture suggests something else: Worshipers in the festival idolize "newly sprung deities" and accept the person/thing distinction. When Niobe interrupts the festival, then, she stops the so-called *things* from placing the so-called free, autonomous subject on an undeserved pedestal, exposing the illusory power of the transcendental subject. She questions, before the letter, the "frontier" between the human beings and the gods and the rights they convey based on everyone's finding his or her proper place. Three times in two successive stanzas, Latona and Apollo say that Niobe's greatest crime is not her hubris but the collective "rebellion" she incites among the people against established frontiers. When Niobe dissolves the frontier between subjects and things, she becomes what Kant calls an unjust enemy worthy of unlimited violence.

In response, the poem's voice shifts from third to second person, as if the poem now mourns a particular person lost amid law-founding violence: "Then didst thou, *Sipylos*, the language hear / Of fate portentous whistling in the air . . . / So to thine horse thou gav'st the golden reins, / Gav'st him to rush impetuous o'er the plains: / But ah! A fatal shaft from *Phoebus'* hand / Smites through thy neck, and sinks thee on the sand."⁴⁵ Perhaps this is Wheatley inadvertently shifting from epyllion to elegy, if only for a stanza, to mourn a death she witnessed in being taken into slavery. Admittedly, this is speculation. What is for sure is that Wheatley's elegies carry out a mourning process that is inseparable from her own familial and communal losses before reaching the United States.⁴⁶ Although at one point Niobe boasted of a certain perfection—"no frowns of fortune has my soul to dread," she

says early in the poem—the decimation of her wealth does not alter her “love too vehement” toward her children (ll. 80, 35). Quite the contrary, her love persists through this decimation despite Latona and Apollo’s intent to render her and her people unworthy of mourning.

Amid the chaos one finds an ontological sociality (a collectivity founded in shared vulnerability), accentuated by the confrontation with finitude, which maintains a stand against the so-called gods:

Niobe heard, and with indignant eyes
 She thus express’d her anger and surprize:
 “Why is such privilege to them allow’d? . . .”
 Niobe now, less haughty than before,
 With lofty head directs her steps no more
 How strangely chang’d!—yet beautiful in woe
 On each pale cor[p]se the wretched mother spread
 Lay overwhelm’d with grief, and kiss’d her dead,
 Then rais’d her arms, and thus, in accents slow,
 “Be sated cruel *Goddess!* with my woe; . . .
 Ah! take this wretched life you deign’d to save,
 With them I too am carried to the grave.
 Rejoice triumphant, my victorious foe,
But show the cause from whence your triumphs flow?
 Tho’ I unhappy mourn these children slain,
 Yet greater numbers to my lot remain.”

(ll. 163–88; *italics mine*)

In “Critique of Violence,” Walter Benjamin says that “in the exercise of violence over life and death, more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself”; he also associates this exercise with “fate.”⁴⁷ Fate initiates or reinforces the subject’s legal standing when begged to decide on another’s life or death. Wheatley was not lost on this, considering that when Niobe begs for her last living daughter’s life, the poem says “the Fates her *suit* deny,” anticipating Kant and Benjamin’s legal rhetoric with “suit” as well as associating it with “fate” (l. 211). When Niobe demands that the Fates “show the cause from whence [their] triumphs flow” (l. 186), she insults them once more by demanding an explanation from those whose legal standing should be jus-

tification enough. We should remember that Kant claims that a subject can do whatever he or she wishes with a thing. Therefore, Apollo's final onslaught against all of Thebes' attempts to nullify Niobe's threatening presence, which has less to do with breaking the law and more to do with undermining the legal framework and its moral metaphysics altogether.

In Benjamin's estimation, by not killing Niobe, the gods make her "more guilty than before, both as an eternally mute bearer of guilt and as a boundary stone on the frontier between men and gods."⁴⁸ In the legend, she becomes a statue crying endlessly for the loss of her family at the hands of the gods. It is unclear in Wilson's painting whether Niobe has become petrified with guilt as Ovid's legend suggests. Wheatley exploits this ambiguity to end the poem *before* Niobe turns to stone, thereby undoing the legend's conclusion. This has several aesthetic, literary historical, and ethical implications. A recurring phrase in the poem may explain why Wheatley alters the poem's conclusion. It resounds most pronouncedly in the first stanza: "Muse! . . . Guide my pen in lofty strains to show / The *Phrygian* queen, all beautiful in woe" (l. 10). In *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant says, "Well-being" or "woe" "signifies" "our state of agreeableness or disagreeableness, of gratification or pain . . . and if we desire or avoid an object . . . we do so only insofar as it is referred . . . to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure it causes."⁴⁹ "Woe" designates any sensible displeasure with no relation to the will. Recall that the *Metaphysics of Morals* says a "moral deed" only counts as such in relation to the author's "free choice," that is, to those people called legal persons, not those people called things. To Kant, Niobe's suffering is mere displeasure without ethical value.

If Niobe suffered mere displeasure, however, she surely would have relented and accepted the gods' superiority after losing so much. Her relentlessness implies a desire that goes beyond the pleasure principle altogether.⁵⁰ Whereas Kant believes the ethical must abandon sensuality, Niobe's ethics works through the sensual not so much in terms of eros in this poem, but certainly in terms of intimate touch, with Niobe "kiss[ing]" her dead and holding her last living daughter at "her breast" before she was murdered by Apollo (ll. 178, 208).⁵¹ Rather than make the end a Pietà-esque reuniting of mother and daughter, Wheatley refuses this redemptive take: Instead, readers must wrestle with inconclusiveness, not finding solace in a restored

single origin but, instead, mourning those lost while wading in the potential for new relations in dispersion, following Niobe's example when she mourns the "slain" while concluding, "Yet greater numbers to my lot remain" (ll. 187–88).

Although Kant would likely see Niobe as the proof that boundaries must be respected, Wheatley's poem reveals the extremes some will take in hiding the contingent character of current ontological, political, and ethical boundaries so that their power will appear eternal, above reproach. However, just as the bloodshed of erecting colonial frontiers spills over Wilson's painterly frame, another enactment of the human pours out of those framed by Kantian discourse as things. In Niobe's suffering, her "wretched" condition foreshadows a form of life constantly targeted by law for threatening the nation-state's stability *from within*, precisely because this "lot" cannot and will not accept the image of European Man or its morality. There, one finds a "beauty" in "woe," which contests boundaries established by those who want nothing but another's absolute subservience; which inhabits the limits of universality (Kant's slave commerce) and intimates a common humanity in its place; which restores a more complex linkage between aesthetic representation and real object, seeing that it undoes the visual framing *from within*; which exposes the Kantian subject's *interested* desire to objectify for imperial gain; which resituates beauty within the shared mourning and restlessness of the objectified rather than the Kantian observer unmoved by mass suffering. These are the imperfect children scattered by colonial violence. If Niobe's pride were mere haughtiness, then she would surely have turned away from this wretched lot. Instead, she stays with the dead and the dying. The beauty of this poem is that by ending without Niobe turning to stone, Wheatley "maintains a power of refusal" (to submit to illegitimate powers) that "is capable of opening up a future," so long as one combines it with her form of study that rewrites the West through the complexity of black experience.⁵²

Ironically, many of Wheatley's readers think she versifies this image to protect Eurocentric notions of aesthetic beauty and moral perfection, when "Niobe" breaks with that Eurocentrism to expand the realm of art and ethics to include a wider swath of humanity. Because a final stanza was added to the poem "by another hand" for publication, some commentators see this as reason to question the entire poem's authenticity; others have doubted

her genius by mischaracterizing the poem as an unfinished academic exercise. In my argument, this final stanza can mean one of two things: Someone thought Wheatley simply forgot the final stanza, not realizing Wheatley wanted Niobe to reject the guilt signified by petrification; or, since someone rightly perceived the poem's radical questioning of territory and cultural authority they added a final stanza to set another frontier. In either case, it leaves us with decisions: Will we set another frontier on Wheatley's writing by claiming mastery of her work? Or will we carry on the tradition of resistance Wheatley's poetry enacts through ongoing study? To put the second question differently, if we could write something other than this final stanza, something that responds to the complexity of Wheatley's poetry, what would it be? What sort of study would continue the *translatio studii* she exemplifies?

Following the former objectifies Wheatley as an "an eternally mute bearer of guilt."⁵³ The altered poem itself reveals how fantastical, though deleterious, this decision would be. This final stanza feels rushed, lacks the fluidity of Wheatley's verse, appears to know the ending but is uncomprehending, and forecloses the creative, critical, and affective possibilities she leaves open. It is an anticollaborative stance passing itself off as "equal" to Wheatley's literary effort. This stance barely arrives at a centrist positioning that deems Wheatley loyal to black culture but still facing the tribunals.

Then again, if new forms of mythic violence are to be critiqued and combated by new forms of resistance, then we, too, must occupy the fugitive space between Wheatley's concluding stanza and the false frontier placed upon it. Inhabiting this fugitive space invites us to abandon our sense of mastery of Wheatley's poetic volume in order to sift through the disheveled origins of African American letters and grapple with the wide range of possibilities opening and opened by her canonical and extant writings that work in multiple literary, historical, and political contexts. Her poetry remains worthy of study and, I would add, even collaboration, if we are willing to join the scattered children surviving the legislative and cultural tribunals, to continue Wheatley's complex mix of production and refusal. All this is to say that genuine study of Wheatley's poetry would involve a radical re-writing of the present that continues her resistance to frontiers and imperial sovereignty in "another hand."

NOTES

1. I derive the term *supernationality* from Edmund Husserl, "The Vienna Lecture," in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 270.
2. Henry Louis Gates, "Phillis Wheatley on Trial," *New Yorker*, January 20, 2003, 83, 87.
3. Joanna Brooks, "Our Phillis, Ourselves," *American Literature* 82, no. 1 (2010): 1–28.
4. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 176.
5. Serge Leclair, *A Child Is Being Killed: On Primary Narcissism and the Death Drive*, trans. Marie-Claude Hays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.
6. On this point, see Erica Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
7. My use of "strange birth" has several sources. I derive the phrase most directly from Richard Wright's discussion of the emergence of black diasporic culture in *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 11. Also see the second section of the more psychoanalytically inflected work, Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 69–73.
8. Russell Reising, *Loose Ends: Closure and Crisis in the American Social Text* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1996), 81.
9. Gates, "Phillis Wheatley on Trial," 87.
10. Brent Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 14.
11. Arthur Schomburg quoted in R. Lynn Matson, "Phillis Wheatley—Soul Sista?" *Phylon* 33, no. 3 (1972): 223.
12. James Weldon Johnson, preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), xxvii.
13. Robert Hayden, *Kaleidoscope: Poems by American Negro Poets* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1967), xx.
14. See Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014); Sondra O'Neale, "A Slave's Subtle War: Phillis Wheatley's Use of Biblical Myth and Symbol," *Early American Literature* 21, no. 2 (1986): 144–65; and chapters 2 and 3 in Katherine C. Bassard, *Spiritual Interrogations: Culture Gender and Community in Early African American Women's Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 28–70. Of course, for the most long-standing efforts at recovering and revising Wheatley's reputation, see John C. Shields, *Phillis Wheatley's Poetics of Liberation: Backgrounds and Contexts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee

Press, 2008) and *Phillis Wheatley and the Romantics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010); and John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore, eds., *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011).

15. Katy Chiles, "Becoming Colored in Wheatley's and Occom's Early America," *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1398–1417.

16. Jennifer Thorn, "Phillis Wheatley's Ghosts: The Racial Melancholy of New England Protestants," *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 50, no. 1 (2009): 73–99.

17. Robert Kendrick, "Re-membering America: Phillis Wheatley's Intertextual Epic," *African American Review* 30, no. 1 (1996): 72.

18. Leclair, *A Child Is Being Killed*, 32.

19. Warren Montag, "Althusser: Law and the Threat of the Outside," in *Althusser and Law*, ed. Laurent du Sutter (New York: Routledge, 2013), 22.

20. *Ibid.*, 23.

21. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books), 279.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 51–52.

24. Ronald Judy, "Kant and the Negro," *Surfaces* 1, no. 8 (1991): 19.

25. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 45, 46.

26. "Aristotle introduces the natural slave in book I of *Politics* when discussing the institution of chattel slavery, conceptualized in relation to the individual household master and slave. . . . As a consequence, Asiatic political subjection to an absolute monarch . . . becomes confusingly intertwined with the doctrine of individuals who are slaves-by-nature, meant to legitimate the widespread practice within Greece of enslaving non-Greeks, or *barbaroi*." Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 11.

27. Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Human Differences," in *The Idea of Race*, ed. Roberto Bernasconi and Tommy Lee Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 8.

28. For more on systematicity, see Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 20.

29. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 162.

30. Notably, Kant's moral subject relationship to "systems upon systems" affirms a political tendency that runs directly counter to, say, Islamic Africa's forms of governance from the early modern moment and the eighteenth century, when "spatial dynamics" produced an "itinerant territoriality."

Itinerant territoriality coupled rootedness with a “principle of dispersion, and the deterritorialization of allegiances,” such that “strangers, *slaves*, and subjects could in effect rely on several different sovereignties at one time.” The most popular strains of Enlightenment thought render these complexities epiphenomenal since they would disabuse Europe of its illusions about black inferiority and nothingness and, from there, render European imperial expansion unnecessary, if not unethical. See Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent DuBois (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017), 99.

31. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 158–59.

32. Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 295.

33. *Ibid.*, 295–96.

34. For more on study, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Minor Compositions, 2013).

35. Eric Ashley Hairston, “The Trojan Horse: Classics, Memory, Transformation, and Afric Ambition in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*,” in Shields and Lamore, eds., *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, 58.

36. John C. Shields, “Phillis Wheatley’s Use of Classicism,” *American Literature* 52, no. 1 (1980): 103.

37. Karen Lerner Dovell, “The Interactions of the Classical Traditions of Literature and Politics in the Work of Phillis Wheatley,” in Shields and Lamore, eds., *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, 37.

38. *Ibid.*, 44.

39. “Wheatley’s treatment of the Niobe myth is also likely the first [published] translation of any kind by an African in America. It certainly appears to be the first African American philological project in the classics. Translating the work of a major classical author is an ambitious undertaking by an African American slave in any case, but Wheatley’s ambition is considerably more developed than Ovid’s. She alters the Ovidian narrative to add her own signature in making another, longer, and more personal foray into the frontiers of the epic, crafting an epyllion in ‘Niobe’ that brings her within sight of her epic idols.” Hairston, “Trojan Horse,” 85.

40. See Maurice Blanchot, “Tracts of the Student-Writer Action Committee (Sorbonne-Censier),” in *Political Writings, 1953–1993* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 79.

41. See Jennifer Thorn, “‘All beautiful in woe’: Gender, Nation, and Phillis Wheatley’s ‘Niobe,’” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 37 (2008): 233–58, and her fascinating essay, “Phillis Wheatley’s Ghosts: The Racial Melancholy of New England Protestants,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 50, no. 1 (2009): 73–99.

42. Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 300.

43. Phillis Wheatley, "On Imagination," in *Complete Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 2001), 36.
44. Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," trans. Craig Owens, *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 6.
45. Phillis Wheatley, "Niobe in Distress for her Children slain by Apollo, from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Book VI. And from a view of the Painting of Mr Richard Wilson," in *Complete Writings*, 56, ll. 121–28; hereafter cited in text.
46. "Wheatley's utilization of the elegiac form may be read as yet another way in which Wheatley attempts to reconnect with Africa and her mother." Devona Mallory, "I Remember Mama: Honoring the Goddess-Mother While Denouncing the Slaveowner-God in Phillis Wheatley's Poetry," in Shields and Lamore, eds., *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, 32.
47. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 286.
48. *Ibid.*, 295.
49. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 81.
50. On this point, see Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961); and also Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (Book VII)*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1997).
51. Contrast this to Latona and Apollo, who massacre an entire village merely out of displeasure and abide by no higher ethical law, but instead attempt to make themselves the law through arbitrary brute force. Unlike them, Niobe is the one along the frontier exemplifying practical reason. Kant misses this due to the pleasure of his own illusions, which hide the arbitrariness of his distinction between persons and things and which hide that fact that the international commerce he justifies necessarily involves the selling of humans. This is the sadomasochistic underside to Kantian ethics, as Lacan has already explored, although "Kant *avec* Wheatley" would nevertheless lead to conclusions other than Lacan's famous 'Kant *avec* Sade.' How ironic that Wheatley's writing has been reduced to all-too-patient protest or accommodation, rather than praised for poetically rendering the first image of a stand against mythic violence in African American letters, or for being a contemporary alternative to Kant's ethics.
52. Blanchot, "Tracts of the Student-Writer Action Committee," 79.
53. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 295.

Rousseau: Vital Instinct and Pity*Pierre Macherey*

The final natural figure of the sympathetic bond we will analyze is correlated with the spontaneity of a vital force [*élan vital*]: It gives this force a structure of a biological type, even before it is possible to speak of a feeling or an inclination.¹ The sympathetic bond arises from itself without any association with representations that might become the object of a rational evaluation. This gives rise to an examination (description and interpretation) of sympathetic behaviors [*des comportements sympathiques*] that presents them as a specific determination of living being that directly expresses its living character through them. In relation to all preceding investigations, this study assumes a restriction of the field to which the model of sympathy is applied. It no longer extends over the whole of nature, but is restricted to one of its well-defined spheres: that which individuates the forms of living beings. But—and this is the essential aspect from the point of view that occupies us here—by conferring a completely natural character on sympathy, this study no longer sees it as exclusively

limited to the competence of the human order, which itself appears, insofar as it is equally, but not by its choices, conceived in these explanations as contained in a larger, and seemingly more fundamental, system of natural determination.

In order to isolate the aspect of sympathy that will reveal it as a primordial form of the vital instinct, I examine those texts by Rousseau in which pity, grasped at the limit of the animal and the human, is presented as fundamental to natural right. I draw on three references that directly address the theme of pity: the *Second Discourse*, *Emile*, and the *Essay on the Origin of Language*.

Beginning with the first text in which a reference to the principle of pity appears, the *Second Discourse* of 1754, I find the following passage in the preface:

Meditating on the first and simplest operations of the human soul, I believe I perceive in it two principles preceding reason, one of which interests us ardently in our well-being and our self-preservation, and the other of which inspires in us a natural repugnance to see any sensitive being, and principally our fellow humans, perish or suffer. It is from the concurrence and combination that our mind is capable of making of these two principles, without it being necessary to introduce that of sociability, that all the rules of natural right appear to me to flow—rules which reason is later compelled to reestablish on other foundations when, through its successive developments, it has succeeded in stifling nature.²

Thus, the natural base of all human behavior [*les comportements humains*], insofar as it arises from determinations anterior to reason and independent of sociability, is composed of self-love [*l'amour de soi*], that is, the instinct of self-preservation, and pity, that is, revulsion at the sight of suffering, which is presented in the form of a kind of spontaneous benevolence, completely opposed to the unbridled aggressivity that Hobbes attributed to natural man, by virtue of a theological presupposition, even a prejudice, that had led him to consider man a fallen being lacking any of the characteristics of innocence. Given these two spontaneous sentiments, the one concerning the individual in relation to himself, and the other his relation to others, the question is then knowing who these others are. What does Rousseau mean in the text just cited when he writes: “and principally our fellow human

beings [*nos semblables*]”? Does not this specification involve the intervention of reason and the faculty of comparison proper to it by simultaneously postulating the premises of sociability? Moreover, the correlation between these two principles remains to be determined: To what extent do they complement and limit each other?

The thesis formulated above is taken up in its radical form in the paragraphs from the first part of the *Discourse* dedicated to the description of the state of nature:

Pity, a disposition suitable to beings as weak and as subject to so many ills as we are, [is] a virtue all the more universal and all the more useful to man as it precedes the use of all reflection in him, and so natural that the beasts themselves sometimes show perceptible signs of it.³

It is therefore the spontaneous form of conscience prior to reflection: In opposition to the outbreak of murderous instincts described by Hobbes, which is in fact, according to Rousseau, a product of society and the corruption to which it gives rise, this unreflective consciousness corresponds to the spontaneous sense that the living being has of its own weakness, insofar as it is living, that in a certain way intuitively produces in him a respect for life and a tendency to preserve it as much as possible:

Such is the pure movement of nature prior to all reflection. Such is the force of natural pity, which the most depraved customs still have difficulty destroying.⁴

As Goldschmidt explains very clearly, it is a question of a sentiment whose origin is purely biological and which has as its subject living beings and as its object life itself. We therefore understand why pity is matched with self-love [*l'amour de soi*]: It has the same preservative or preservationist dimension, applicable not only to the individual but to the species, even to the realm of nature considered in the full extent of its scope. There is naturally an instinctive repugnance in the living being toward anything that calls into question not only himself in his distinct individuality, but the entire order to which he belongs simply by virtue of being alive. It is thus a matter of a biological solidarity that expresses above all the fundamental unity of the living and has nothing to do with sociability and the forms of rationalization that it implies that correspond to a denaturation of the vital instincts.

In fact—and this is its essential character—this spontaneous and therefore unreflective sentiment (every text cited insists on this crucial fact) is not associated with any representation, and in particular the representation of the other as such. The consciousness of life in its most natural form is not attached to the representation of individual existence in its limited form and, as such, in its limits with respect to other individual existences; this is what explains the importance of note XV of the *Second Discourse* in which Rousseau clearly opposes self-love [*l'amour de soi*], which is not limiting, and self-esteem [*l'amour propre*], which, on the contrary, is fundamentally self-interested, the latter concerning precisely the individual as such, and presupposing the forms of rationality proper to the social state. This consciousness thus takes the form of a unanimous, spontaneously shared sentiment by which I can feel the pain in another's body in the absence of any reasoning, reflection, and calculation.

It is in this way that, in his elaboration of the concept of pity, Rousseau confronts the perverse analysis, clearly of Hobbesian inspiration, provided by La Rochefoucauld, with the aim of demarcating himself from it:

Pity is often a feeling of our own ills in the ills of others. It is a clever foresight of the misfortunes into which we can fall; we give succor to others in order to induce them to give us some on similar occasions; and these favors that we do for them are, properly speaking, goods we do to ourselves in advance.⁵

Along the same lines, we might also cite:

What men have named friendship is only a society, only a reciprocal management of interests, and only an exchange of good offices; it is, finally, only a relation in which self-esteem [*l'amour propre*] always presents itself with something to gain.⁶

We often persuade ourselves to love people more powerful than ourselves; and nevertheless, it is self-interest alone which produces our friendship. We do not give ourselves to them for the good we want to do to them, but for the good we want to receive from them.⁷

According to this interpretation, in thinking or pretending to think of others, we continue to think about ourselves, following a behavior founded on a prediction and an expectation of reciprocity, which bases identification with others on the perspective of a mutually understood exchange. This is

in every sense of the word speculation. But it is precisely this type of analysis from which Rousseau intends to depart by making pity the foundation of natural law:

Even if it were true that pity were only a feeling that puts us in the place of the one who suffers [*This is the thesis underlined by La Rochefoucauld*]*—an obscure and lively feeling in savage man, developed [that is, reasoned] but weak in civil man—what difference would this make for the truth of what I say, except to give it more strength? Indeed, commiseration will be all the more energetic to the extent that the onlooking animal identifies more intimately with the suffering animal. Now, it is obvious that this identification must have been infinitely closer in the state of nature than in the state of reasoning.*⁸

Pity—as a natural sentiment that spontaneously links living being to living being through the relation between an “animal” spectator and an “animal” sufferer, and not of individuals endowed with a conscious representation of themselves, and conceiving their relation in the form of an exterior relation—supposes a total and primordial identification with the other, an identification that from the outset precisely excludes the recognition of the other as other.

It is therefore quite certain that pity is a natural feeling which, by moderating the activity of love of oneself in each individual, contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species. It is that which carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering. It is that which, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, morals, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its gentle voice. It is that which will deter every robust savage from robbing a weak child or an infirm old man of his hard-won subsistence, if he himself hopes to be able to find his own elsewhere. It is that which, in place of that sublime maxim of reasoned justice, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, inspires in all men this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one, *Do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others.*⁹

The innate respect for life therefore has nothing in common with a maxim of “rational justice” that remains based on the principle of reciprocity and exchange, since it spontaneously expresses the consciousness proper to the natural order in which there is no clear difference between yours and mine, a difference introduced by reason and the social bond.

Given the coherence of the thesis just examined, it is surprising to find in chapter IX of the *Essay on the Origin of Language* an analysis of pity that seems to be based on another interpretive system, and that tends to present pity no longer as a natural inclination, but as a social affection, which, as such, assumes the intervention of reflection and judgment, that is, the rational development of the social bond:

We develop social affection only as we become enlightened. Although pity is native to the human heart, it would remain eternally quiescent unless it were activated by imagination. How are we moved by pity? By getting outside ourselves and identifying with a being who suffers. We suffer only as much as we believe him to suffer. It is not in ourselves, but in him that we suffer. It is clear that such transport supposes a great deal of acquired knowledge. How am I to imagine ills of which I have no idea? How would I suffer in seeing another suffer, if I know not what he is suffering, if I am ignorant of what he and I have in common?¹⁰

We see that the mechanisms of identification, far from being spontaneous, presuppose a rational awareness without which natural pity might remain a latent inclination, eternally asleep and awaiting the means for its activation. In other words, it seems that pity needs to be cultivated to be enacted.

According to this logic, it is not surprising to find in *Emile*, that is, precisely in the context of the development of an educational project, the same type of analysis in Part IV: the moment, relatively late (Emile is sixteen years old!), devoted to the awakening of sensibility, following the discussions of the body (Part I), the external senses (II), and reason, that is, the ability to compare representations (III):

To become sensitive and pitying, the child must know that there are beings like him who suffer what he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and that there are others whom he ought to conceive of as able to feel them too [*The rest of text repeats, in exactly the same terms, the genesis of pity already explained in the Essay on the Origin of Language*]. . . .

To excite and nourish this nascent sensibility [*This is therefore an education of sentiment*], to guide it or follow it in its natural inclination, what is there to do other than to offer the young man objects on which the expansive force of his heart can act—objects which swell the heart, which extend it to other beings, which make it find itself everywhere outside of itself—and carefully to keep away those which contract and concentrate the heart and tighten the spring of the human I?¹¹

If pity corresponds to a “natural inclination,” it remains the case that Emile must be led by the appropriate means to follow this inclination: In other words, it is necessary that he be diverted from any behavior that would cause him to withdraw into or “focus” on himself in opposition to the dilating and expansive power of nature. Here, indeed, it is the movement toward self-esteem [*l’amour propre*] that seems irresistible, rather than that which develops disinterested sentiments, which seem on the contrary to be blocked and, in the light of this fact, generated and maintained only artificially.

From here, the three maxims on pity are enumerated in the remainder of the text:

1. *It is not in the human heart to put ourselves in the place of people who are happier than we, but only in that of those who are more pitiable.*¹²

Rousseau underlines here a thesis exactly the opposite of that of Hume, who had explained that there is a natural sympathy by the poor with regard to the rich. Rousseau adds the following comment on this thesis:

It follows, therefore, that, in order to incline a young man to humanity [*thus, it is clear that we are no longer in the order of the spontaneous élan and instinct*], far from making him admire the brilliant lot of others [*which would awaken in him the desire for emulation*], one must show him the sad sides of that lot, one must make him fear it.¹³

We see in this way that pity becomes inseparable from speculation on the future, which is the condition of identification according to the logic outlined at the beginning of the La Rochefoucauld’s text: We pity another’s troubles because we fear that one day we will suffer them ourselves. It is clear that, in these conditions, pity is transformed into a social sentiment, which presupposes, among other things, unequal conditions, a difference of status between rich and poor that is foreign to nature.

2. *One pities in others only those ills from which one does not feel oneself exempt.*¹⁴

The preceding speculation therefore takes on the meaning of a sad rumination on what the future holds for us and is thus inscribed in the context of a pedagogy of fear.

Similarly:

The man who did not know pain would know neither the tenderness of humanity nor the sweetness of commiseration. His heart would be moved by nothing. He would not be sociable; he would be a monster among his kind.¹⁵

It is man's weakness which makes him sociable; it is our common miseries that turn our hearts to humanity. . . . It follows from this that we are attached to our fellows less by the sentiment of their pleasures than by the sentiment of their pains, for we see far better in the latter the identity of our natures with theirs and the guarantees of their attachment to us. If our common needs unite us by interest, our common miseries unite us by affection.¹⁶

Robert Derathé has offered the following commentary on these passages:

In these texts, Rousseau insists on the human character of pity: it is through pity that we realize the identity of nature which unites us to other men. We see therefore that Rousseau concludes in his turn by making the identity of nature the true foundation of sociability. "Humanity": this word, in its polysemy, designates the sentiment by which we become conscious of our natural identity with other men, that is, of our "humanity."¹⁷

It is really this sense to which the commentary proposed by Rousseau in the following maxim is oriented:

Do not, therefore, accustom your pupil to regard the sufferings of the unfortunate and the labors of the poor from the height of his glory; and do not hope to teach him to pity them if he considers them alien to him. Make him understand well that the fate of these of unhappy men can be his.¹⁸

Emile was thus led to pity the unfortunate only to the extent that he understood that he was potentially similar to them and that their fate could become his. But this sentiment, while corresponding to an "inclination" that is natural to him, does not exactly arise spontaneously within him, but presupposes a reflection on the possible, and thus a form of reasoning that proceeds through comparison.

3. *The pity one has for another's misfortune is measured not by the quantity of that misfortune but by the sentiment which one attributes to those who suffer it.*¹⁹

Once again, we are dealing with a form of identification that is artificial and depends on the relay of the imagination, through the intermediation of which one takes leave of oneself in order to judge the sentiments of the other qualitatively.

Clearly the analysis of pity presented in the *Essay on the Origin of Language* and *Emile* introduces more than a nuance in relation to those of the *Second Discourse*, and we could speak of a genuine contradiction in this regard (this discussion is nicely summarized by C. Porset in his introduction to the *Essay*). Indeed, in *Emile*, pity has ceased to be a spontaneous force and by this fact irresistible, and has become instead a deferred sentiment whose expression occurs through the intervention of reflection. As a consequence, it presents two simultaneous aspects that seem at first glance difficult to reconcile:

1. The argument introduces an element of comparison into the development of sentiment, which establishes a sort of identification from a distance between self and other, and no longer a primordial immersion in the common current of a shared life: to suffer with and for the other, it is necessary that I imagine the possibility of one day being in his place, which presupposes at least the outline of a judgment: What if that were happening to me as well?
2. But at the same time, in accordance with the natural inclination to pity, this judgment does not lead, however, to a calculation of self-interest: I am not interested in the sufferings of the other in the hope that he will one day repay my interest with interest, following the economic or juridical principle of exchange, on the basis of which La Rochefoucauld carries out his analysis, which is a kind of maxim of rational justice, small-minded rather than sublime. For the fact that pity takes the form of a sentiment guarantees its disinterested character: I completely identify with the other, independently of any calculation that would certainly corrupt self-love [*l'amour de soi*] into self-esteem [*l'amour propre*].

We therefore see that for the theory coherent in its simplicity and described in the *Second Discourse* and *Emile*, an ambiguous explanation is substituted, interposing an element of reflection in the genesis of sentiment by means of a comparison between self and other that is unthinkable in the context of the state of nature where there is neither a clear representation of

the self nor of the other, because there is no place at all for representations. But this discrepancy [*décalage*] is perfectly explained if we understand that these two explanations are not situated on the same plane.

The first explains what pity naturally is, that is, based on a point of view that we can call ontological: It outlines the primordial determinations of instinct that Rousseau attributes to them through the play of a theoretical fiction in the state of nature that is a metaphysical staging of our original and essential condition. He explains that it is through this scene that things must essentially take place, and that it is this that constitutes their “natural inclination”: This foundation can be covered up by other determinations that disrupt its expression, but it never disappears completely as would a prior, past state (which would be the state of nature if it had a historical rather than an ontological dimension). In a sense it always takes place thus: The man in the state of nature exists permanently within us in a latent state, as an inclination to be reactivated (and this is what allows us to reconstitute its characteristics through what Rousseau calls a “meditation”).

The second analysis is, on the contrary, marked by the conditions of history, from which the preceding analysis was completely separated. It tends to make clear the way in which the rights of natural sentiment at the level of its empirical expressions can be reestablished, that is, in some way reactivated, in the context fixed by the social state (Emile is not born outside of society), and thus by necessarily rational means that introduce an artificial dimension into its expression. This would be in fact the Rousseauist definition of the educational project: How, through artificial means, can we reestablish nature with its rights in the individual, since these rights are from the outset alienated by the conditions of collective life?

We therefore see in Rousseau not one but two successive doctrines of pity: The first makes it a completely natural instinct; the second analyzes it as a social sentiment. At this point, a new problematic emerges: Under what conditions does the transition from natural instinct to social sentiment occur, according to a schema that is at once that of a (necessarily collective) history and that of a pedagogy (whose project, as Rousseau conceives it, remains individual), supposing both society and culture, and with them reason and language?

NOTES

1. *Translator's note*: I have translated Rousseau's distinction between "*l'amour de soi*" and "*l'amour propre*," as "self-love" and "self-esteem." Since the English terms are not exact translations, I have followed them with the French terms in brackets.
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* in *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 54–55.
3. *Ibid.*, 83.
4. *Ibid.*
5. François de La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, trans. Stuart D. Warner and Stéphane Douard (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 52–53 (translation modified).
6. *Ibid.* (translation modified), 18.
7. *Ibid.*, 19.
8. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 84 (translation modified).
9. *Ibid.*, 85.
10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (New York: Frederick Ungar Press, 1966), 32 (translation modified).
11. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile; or, On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 222–23.
12. *Ibid.*, 223.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 224.
15. *Ibid.*, 87.
16. *Ibid.*, 221.
17. Robert Derathé, *Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1995), 149.
18. Rousseau, *Emile; or, On Education*, 224.
19. *Ibid.*, 225.

**System and Subject in Adam Smith's Political Economy:
Nature, Vitalism, and Bioeconomic Life**

Catherine Packham

Enlightenment Systems

In 1755, when he was in his early thirties, Adam Smith drew up a document in which, as his biographer Dugald Stewart records, he staked his claim to originality in relation to a number of principles:

Man is generally considered by statesmen and projectors as the materials of a sort of political mechanics. Projectors disturb nature in the course of her operations in human affairs; and it requires no more than to let her alone, and give her fair play in the pursuit of her ends, that she may establish her own designs. . . . Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes and a tolerable administration of justice; all the rest being brought about by the natural course of things. All governments which thwart this natural course, which force things into another channel, or which endeavour to arrest the progress

of society at a particular point, are unnatural, and to support themselves are obliged to be oppressive and tyrannical.¹

If Smith doesn't actually use the word *system* here, this is as near as we might get to a succinct expression of what, in his later *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), was welcomed and celebrated as a new and complete system of political economy. Twenty years earlier, Samuel Johnson had asserted that commerce "comprises innumerable particulars unconnected with each other," but the originality of Smith's work, despite the claims of the 1755 manuscript, lay not in its constitutive elements and principles so much as in its ability to combine apparently disparate particulars into a coherent unity through connection and arrangement: into precisely what Johnson himself had defined as a "system" in his *Dictionary*.² When Smith's first biographer, Dugald Stewart, published the excerpt from the 1755 manuscript quoted above, he quickly moved from Smith's claims to originality of principle to praise instead the more important originality of system. Indeed, Stewart's short biographical "Account" of Smith's life uses the word *system* 152 times, while offering a precise definition of what the term means: For Stewart, a "system" is a means of "connecting and methodizing" otherwise "scattered ideas" to enable principles to be "unfolded in their proper order and connection."³ Stewart's definition of "system" reflects the importance of the term in Scottish Enlightenment pedagogical and philosophical culture, and it is in fact deeply Smithian: In another important early paper, "The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries," Smith explores the psychological processes and aesthetic impulses foundational to philosophical inquiry, of which an account is offered as the process by which the curious mind creates a "beautiful" system to connect and thereby explain disparate observed phenomena.⁴ If this juvenile essay is an early analysis of knowledge production as explicitly system making, then the *Wealth of Nations* (prefigured in this 1755 fragment) is the mature fruit.

Smith's career thus readily exemplifies Clifford Siskin's claim that the genre of system lies at the heart of the Enlightenment: As a Baconian tool, and a generic form that mediates knowledge, it is the "formal means to Enlightenment's end."⁵ Indeed, Siskin reads another document Smith produced in 1755, his letter to the *Edinburgh Review*, as a manifesto for Scottish participation in the cultural and political opportunities of Britain, newly

available after the Act of Union, through precisely the labor of systematizing—that is, “arranging and methodizing”—English philosophical discoveries.⁶ The kind of systemizing Smith has in mind here is different from that overtly attacked in my first quotation: the manufacture or engineering of a “political mechanics” whose system is at odds with nature, and attempts to force it into the wrong channels.⁷ The system that “arranges and methodizes,” by contrast, discovers a system rather than makes one, a discovery achieved through the kind of fortuitous meditation on disparate appearances described in the essay “Philosophical Enquiries”; in its efforts to connect observed appearances into a linked explanatory theory, it is comparable to a late stage in the inductive process of Newtonian natural philosophy, whose empirical methods Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment more generally took as a model.⁸ Correspondingly, in his attack on the system-maker who reduces humankind to the “materials of a sort of political mechanics,” Smith implies that the best kind of system making is in fact the uncovering of the true “system” of nature. The best system is not a manmade mechanism; rather, system is innate in nature’s own “natural course,” even vitally or organically so, his language might suggest. Against the imposition of false systems, Smith’s system makes a higher claim: to be (like Newton’s) the true system of nature itself.⁹

Such a claim, in a piece of writing that is overtly pacific but deceptively pugnacious, reveals how Smith’s methodology mobilizes a particular version or account of nature, to serve his philosophical and rhetorical ends. The Enlightenment genre of system emerges here not as a passive tool but as a debatable form and object of contest, in methodological tussles and exchanges that carried consequences not simply for contemporary maps of knowledge, but (to pick up on Smith’s metaphors) the health of nations and the wealth of their subjects; “nature” is precisely the ground of such struggles. Smith’s analysis of the measures necessary to ensure national prosperity draws considerable rhetorical authority from a methodological distinction between the systems dreamed up by political mechanics, on the one hand, and natural systems as observed by the philosopher, on the other. And whereas the 1755 manuscript suggests that the best philosophical system making doesn’t disturb nature but gives it “fair play,” the essay “Philosophical Enquiries” examines the production of philosophical systems as a process strongly governed by the natural mental pleasure resultant on identifying

and surveying a connective system. The activities of observing, or perceiving, the hidden connections through which nature's system can be glimpsed—that is, the practice of philosophy, as described in this essay—receive pleasurable confirmation, as if by reward of nature, in the mental pleasure of aesthetic contemplation, which the beautiful system elicits. The discovery of nature's system, in the external world of human affairs, as in the natural world addressed by Newton, is thus confirmed through the reciprocal nature of human pleasure in its contemplation.

Beyond questions of philosophical methodology, the 1755 excerpt from Smith is also of interest for its indication of the kind of language Smith would use in *The Wealth of Nations*, some twenty-one years later, which further elaborates the systematic operation of the “natural course of things.” This “natural course,” he asserts, should not be disturbed, but should be “let alone” and not forced “into another channel,” as the best way to ensure wealth and prosperity. Such language suggests that Smith's political economy is a “system of life” (to evoke this volume's title) in at least two senses. First, it is a system that explains how human life sustains itself materially and economically; thus it is a system that describes and systematizes (orders, arranges, methodizes) life, desire, effort, labor, and its products. In this aspect, it has been described by Catherine Gallagher, presumably with Foucault's biopower in mind, as “bioeconomics”: a political economic discourse that addresses the interrelations between economic activity and bodies, population, food, labor, and so forth.¹⁰ As “bioeconomics,” political economy constructs and describes the economic activities and relations that sustain and produce life. Gallagher contrasts bioeconomics with “somaecconomics”: the theorization of the thoughts, psyche, emotions, pleasures, and pains of the economic subject, all of which are both causes and consequences of economic activity, and are equally foundational to political economy.¹¹ I want to return to this question of somaecconomics and the economic subject later in this paper. Gallagher's terms, although clearly evoking the Foucauldian episteme of “living things” governing late-eighteenth-century human sciences, including the new discourse of political economy more or less founded by Smith, also subject the idea of such an episteme to further discursive and historical analysis. Gallagher suggests that bioeconomics, which increasingly became a kind of life science, is derived primarily from Malthus, but it is evident from the very first sentence of *Wealth of*

Nations, which identifies labor as the source through which the necessities and conveniences of life are supplied, as well as the means of accumulating wealth for the nation, that the body, with its need for food and rest, and its capacity for reproduction, will be central to Smith's political economy. And although his production of the analytical discourse of political economy is facilitated through a series of abstractions that move away from material and historical particulars, Smithian political economy nevertheless retains a strong sense of labor as primarily the physical effort of human bodies. Smithian political economy thus incorporates bioeconomics from the outset. Further, for Gallagher, bioeconomics postulates something that would be called "life" as an "energy" or "force" that circulates through organic and inorganic nature.¹² Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, in identifying effortful human labor as the means to produce wealth, offered a bioeconomics that systematized the sustained transformation of that life or energy into labor and theorized (primarily through the division of labor) the means to maximize its productive power.

Smith's political economy is thus a "system of life" in one, "bioeconomic," sense. But I suggest it is a system of life in a second sense too, which moves beyond the lives of its subjects as addressed by bioeconomics. Specifically, Smith's political economy constructs the economy as a living system, akin to a natural organism, with interconnected parts, harmonious organization, internal modes of communication and distribution, comparable to contemporary conceptions of the "animal œconomy" of a human body or other living being. Most important, the economic whole is animated and ultimately driven not by what for Smith are the often misguided laws of legislators, but by an independent principle of survival and betterment that is internal to, and coexistent and coextensive with, the economic "body." Smith's presentation of the system of the economy in such terms informs his exposition throughout *Wealth of Nations* but is perhaps most explicit in his attack on the notion, put forward by the French physiocrat François Quesnay, that the economy would prosper only under a "very precise regimen . . . of perfect liberty and perfect justice." Such a suggestion is analogous, Smith says, to the idea that "the health of the human body" would be preserved "only by a certain precise regimen of diet and exercise," when in fact "experience would seem to show that the human body frequently preserves, to all appearances at least, the most perfect state of health under a vast variety of different regimens; even under some which are generally believed to be very

far from being perfectly wholesome.”¹³ In fact, “the human body . . . contains in itself some unknown principle of preservation, capable either of preventing or of correcting, in many respects, the bad effects even of a very faulty regimen.” The same principle of preservation in the political body, Smith continues, is “the natural effort which every man is continually making to better his own condition,” a “uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort” that is “frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things toward improvement, in spite both of the extravagance of government, and of the greatest errors of administration.” Like the “unknown principle of animal life,” this principle “frequently restores health and vigour to the constitution, in spite, not only of the disease, but of the absurd prescriptions of the doctor.”¹⁴ What has been received as a famously *laissez-faire* system of political economy is thus rhetorically and conceptually underpinned by an analogy with life-systems that, mysteriously and powerfully, through an “unknown principle,” maintain and better themselves despite every form of hostile environment and intervention.

Smith’s remarkable faith in the natural healing powers of the body recalls, and arguably was informed by, notions in contemporary medicine and physiology. Specifically, his “unknown principle” echoes the “vital principle,” or mysterious and animating life-force, the postulation of which lay at the heart of the vitalist medicine and physiology that flourished on the Continent and in Scotland at this time. A reaction to the dominant mechanistic paradigms of late-seventeenth-century natural philosophy, and especially its inability to explain organic life-processes, vitalism instead understood bodies as specific life-systems whose operations could not be adequately explained via mechanical laws of motion, but to which instead must be ascribed the existence of their own innate, internal “vital force,” the exact character of which (whether chemical, electrical, material; whether located in the blood as John Hunter believed or, more vaguely, a “certain condition of the nerves or fibres”) remained matter for debate.¹⁵ The Medical School at Edinburgh University, which had close links with centers of vitalist thought on the Continent, was at the forefront of the dissemination of vitalism in Britain. One of its leading figures, Robert Whytt, presented his ideas to the Edinburgh Philosophy Society, to which Smith belonged; his papers included a dispute with the prominent physiologist Albrecht von Haller on the irritability and sensibility of the body, which cut to the heart of vitalist physiology.¹⁶

Another prominent Edinburgh figure, the chemist and physician William Cullen, in 1776 (the year *Wealth of Nations* appeared), published a pamphlet giving advice on the reawakening of the "vital principle" in persons "Drowned and Seemingly Dead." Cullen believed that heat, chaffing the body, blowing smoke into the lungs, a warm bath, opening the veins, or all of the above, might stimulate the restoration of the all-important vital principle in such cases.¹⁷ Cullen was Smith's friend and physician, who, when in 1760 Smith was in a run-down state of health that was serious enough for Cullen to fear that he might not survive the next winter, merely prescribed him a course of fresh air and exercise.¹⁸ And when Smith's friend Hume was in the throes of his final illness, Smith advised against him taking the Bath waters, twice evoking instead the "power of Nature" to repel disease rather than using apothecary's drugs or other interventions.¹⁹ Just as with the living system of the economy, all was to be left to the natural process of the body's intrinsic self-healing abilities.

Smith's economic "system of life" can thus be seen to be a natural system modeled through an explicit analogy with vitalist physiological systems. This observation raises in turn a series of further questions about the creation or production of philosophical systems, which point in quite a different direction from the seemingly passive processes of observation and pleasurable contemplation implied by Smith's early essay on philosophical inquiry. What does it mean, for instance, to transfer a concept such as an "unknown principle of preservation" from one natural system (the body) to another (the economy)? What are the effects or limits of such interdiscursive borrowings, and what might such a move tell us about the whole process of system making, or indeed about their foundational concepts? Describing the relation of his other great philosophical system, his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, to preceding moral philosophies, Smith admits that "almost all of them coincide with some part or other of that which I have been endeavouring to give an account of"; and his essay "Philosophical Inquiries" describes the evolution of philosophical systems in general as a process of simplification by which redundant parts are abandoned with the discovery of "one great connecting principle" that is "found to be sufficient to bind together all the discordant phenomena that occur in a whole species of things."²⁰ In a paper that, in its concerns with the history of concept formation and with the mediation of concepts between disciplines, addresses similar questions to

those that I have just raised, Peter de Bolla uses a similar language of relation and connection to describe not a “great connecting principle,” but a “load-bearing concept” connected through an “architecture” or “grammar” of relation to an “array” of further dependent and interlinked concepts whose thinking is enabled by the load-bearing one.²¹ It is Smith who provides de Bolla’s example of a load-bearing concept: not the “unknown principle of preservation,” but the division of labor, shown by de Bolla to be a conceptual abstraction that furnishes “the architecture for the modern concept of economy” and hence enables the description of “the logic of capital and the mechanism of the market.”²²

Whereas de Bolla’s language is initially architectural, he later switches metaphors to suggest that the genetic code of a concept (such as the division of labor) enables us to understand “the organic processes by which it might produce new or dependent conceptual forms.”²³ Such language casts in organic terms the historical processes of discursive development and conceptual formation; it invites us to understand the production of systems—from the genetic codes embedded in master concepts to the generation of dependent concepts to the proliferation and refinement of later generations, even, perhaps, to the nonexpression of what might be genetically latent, but not yet manifest—as combining the natural with the historically contingent in some imperceptible way.²⁴ In such language, the organic functions as a metaphor of the historic, but also as a mark of its limits, raising the larger question of the relation between contingent historical intervention and natural facts—precisely the territory of Smith’s “Philosophical Inquiries” essay—in the formation of concepts and systems.

Indeed, in Smith’s account, a philosophical system marks a mediation between the historical formation of concepts and an external nature, and although philosophy attempts to explicate nature, it can sometimes be brought up short. This occurs, as de Bolla reminds us, when Smith suggests our propensity to barter (a “fact” of human nature from which commercial society has evolved) is “one of those original principles in our nature, *of which no further account can be given*.”²⁵ Here a historically contingent observation, or construction, of human nature becomes natural fact, on which in turn human society is said to be founded, but that fact, or “original principle in our nature,” is also a point of philosophy’s limits: the operations of nature can be observed, but cannot be further known.

A comparable vanishing point within our own natures, where the historical understanding of the body in time disappears into the unplumbable depths of impenetrable nature, is the principle of self-preservation assumed by vitalist physiology to animate human life in mysterious and unknowable ways—a principle of life of which vitalist methodologies conventionally stated “no further account can be given.” In both instances, nature represents the limits of knowledge; nature, on which Smith’s system is founded, and which is evoked, one way or another, four times in the brief 1755 fragment quoted earlier, is the point where philosophy ends (or conversely, begins). If nature operates in this methodology as the origin of philosophical system, it is also, crucially, unknowable; to construct a philosophical system of nature is also therefore to describe the limits of knowledge. Something of this philosophical externality in relation to its object is expressed in Smith’s deployment of aesthetic response to characterize the philosopher’s relation to nature as “wonder,” “surprise,” and “admiration.” As characterized in his essay “Philosophical Inquiries,” the philosophical pleasure of contemplating systems reads as the pleasure of knowing: as an aesthetico-psychological response, pleasure’s spark is, like that of life itself, the sign of a generated system. But the same logic suggests that where pleasure is, philosophy ends: As well as the mark of philosophy’s conception, pleasure is equally the site of knowledge’s limits.

Systems and Subjects

In the remainder of this essay, I want to return to the question of Smith’s theorization of the economic subject, and the relation between subject and system, which I bracketed earlier. If a political economy informed by vitalism produces the image or metaphor of the economy as a vitally animated organism, animated by a hidden principle or vital force, then what does this imply about Smith’s conception of the subject and the subject’s relation to the economic organism? Such a question raises issues of subjective agency, determination, and individual choice in Smith’s thought, and might even put in jeopardy Smith’s reputation as a liberal philosopher who sees individuals as simply and straightforwardly motivated by reasoned self-interest. We might ask then how far the image of the organism of the economy insists

on, or erases, human agency, whether it complicates Smith's reputation as a liberal philosopher or even replaces it with another Smith, perhaps one whose subjects are informed by the protobiological determination of nature's system.

In pursuing this question of the relationship between economic subjects and the economic system, we might first consider Smith's most famous (but also widely and perhaps willfully misunderstood) image of his system: the invisible hand. As a corporeal image, it suggests a body and hence a subject, but of course the whole point is that it is a hand with no subject; indeed, on both occasions when Smith uses this image, it is to demonstrate that the distributive effects collectively brought about by myriad individual economic actions are produced "as if," but not in fact, by an invisible hand.²⁶ In pointed contrast with mercantilism, Smith's system operates well and fairly, he contends, precisely without the guiding hand or intervention of a regulator. On its most compellingly theoretical or abstract level, it removes the need for a controlling subject, who, to make that point, is dematerialized to invisibility, reduced from a real to a metaphorical presence. The system itself in fact performs the actions of such a subject and in doing so takes the image of the subject, or at least the ghostly disembodied remnant of the subject's hand, for itself.²⁷

As John Guillory has pointed out, Smith's invisible hand is really constituted by the "multitude of invisible hands, the wage-labourers of manufacture."²⁸ As Smith says, "By pursuing his own interest he [the laborer] frequently promotes that of the society more effectively than when he really intends to promote it."²⁹ Smith's systemization of political economy thus takes the economic subject seriously to the extent that it begins with him, seeing him as the location of needs, desires, will, reason, and effort that are themselves systematic and that can be understood systematically. The origins of political economy as a system lie in the perceived or constructed systematicity of the human subject: The systematized subject thus produces the system that subjects him.³⁰

I would like to explore these questions of subjects and systems further through Clifford Siskin's work on Enlightenment systems briefly referenced earlier in this paper. The question of the relationship between subject and system is for Siskin central to the hoary old "problem of periodization" that faces scholars of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, and is thus a consti-

tutive marker of both historical period and historical change. For Siskin, who, as we have seen, identifies the system strongly with the Enlightenment, the problem of periodization emerges with the continuance of the system into the Romantic era, and in the course of his discussion, he asserts that "the Romantic subject . . . is . . . a formal effect of the fate of system."³¹ In what he sees not as an abandonment of system but an overextension of it in the Romantic period, the system is no longer an articulate, self-sufficient entity in itself—able to "talk to itself," in Siskin's phrase—but needs to be supplemented by the self, the "I," or the speaking subject. This Romantic subject is outside of the system, a necessary supplement to it, perhaps idiosyncratic, historically and psychologically distinct, perhaps peculiar or fragmented, or excessive, or otherwise strikingly marked, but certainly a "newly idealized subjectivity," who is nevertheless more compelling than the formal, closed unity of the system.³² If the Romantic subject emerges, according to Siskin, at a moment of overcompletion and excessive systematization, as that which is additional or exterior to systems, we might ask what an Enlightenment subject might be, if there is such a thing, what his or her relation to system is, and whether he or she might be exemplified by the subject in Smith's political economy. An implicit contrast with Siskin's Romantic subject might initially suggest, for instance, that the Enlightenment subject is articulated by and contained within system: obedient, regulated, known, circumscribed, mapped. To this extent he or she might indeed suggest the "invisible" wage-laboring subject in *Wealth of Nations*, whose most disobedient trait is delusion or erroneous belief in the system that motivates his entire life. Do we find anywhere in Smith an Enlightenment subject at odds with the system, or outside it?

A famous letter written in 1734 by the young David Hume to an unknown physician offers one perspective on the Enlightenment subject's relation to system. In it, Hume outlines the pressures he experienced during the demanding philosophical labor that was to result five years later in the publication of his *Treatise of Human Nature*. The letter narrates an exhausting and continuous cycle of his passions, as his "strong Inclination" to study was succeeded by "Laziness of Temper," which was overcome by a "redoubling" of his "Application"; but faced then with his many quires of paper, "in which there is nothing contain'd but my own Inventions," Hume's spirits fail again.³³ Hume's letter speaks to the tendency of the subject to experience

the ebb and flow of his subjective passions as disorder, excess, even as pathology, for Hume diagnoses himself as suffering from the “disease of the learned.” He eventually cures himself of that disease by making a systematic organization of his study and leisure time, by which he seeks to erase the very passions that are constitutive of selfhood by a self-embracing return to system: The letter thus speaks to a felt need for system as a means of containing and managing the continuous flow of personhood, experience, and feeling. We might read this as the reverse of the Romantic subject who, as an “effect of the fate of system,” is somehow post-system or supplementary to system; a rather different movement would appear to be at work in Hume, perhaps something like the Enlightenment subject’s fate as erasure by system in the act of embracing it. As though in confirmation of this, Hume’s experiences, initially written as a letter, that ultimate document of personal experience (although one which may never have been sent) were later rewritten to be incorporated within the system of his *Treatise*, where they appear as the last chapter of book 1.

To return to Smith, we have already noted that the subject is at the heart of his economic system, but what does his imagining of the economy as a vitally animated body suggest about that subject, and what are the consequences of that depiction? In Smith’s image, on one level, subject and system are clearly integrated: If the economic system is a vital, animated body, which works constantly and unconsciously to its own survival and betterment, the subject equates or contributes to the vital force or vital principle that ensures those ends. It is the accumulation of the repeated operations motivated by subjects’ constant attention to their self-interest that steers the macro-economy to health, and guarantees and maintains its equilibrium. Such repeated operations are motivated by the principle of the subject’s constant desire for self-betterment, which Smith tells us “animates” him “constantly” from birth to death.

We should note here that we have returned to Gallagher’s somaeco-nomics: the theorization of the human subject, especially his or her psyche and emotions, sensations, pleasure, pain, in relation to economic behavior. Smith is participating in what Gallagher describes as a strong tradition in British philosophical thought, in which Hume, Hartley, and others were also active, which theorized the so-called springs of action on a foundation of Lockean epistemology. This tradition was especially marked by the

guiding assumption that we are deeply motivated at the level of physical sensation to avoid pain and acquire pleasure; one of its endpoints is utilitarianism, a term obviously associated with Bentham but which had a long prehistory.³⁴ Smith enables us to ask what happens to this tradition when it meets a political economy informed by organic, vitalist images and concepts.

Deriving as it does from such a tradition, Smithian somaeconomics certainly offers an economic subject founded on a theory of subjective motivation: a generalized, naturalized, and psychologized account of the human need for and motivation to labor beyond the point where the basic necessities of life are met. The particular character of Smith's somaeconomics is thrown into relief if compared with Hume, who theorized motivation quite differently, via a mechanism of the passions. In an analysis anticipated by the 1734 letter discussed above, for Hume prolonged idleness in and of itself produces the desire to work. Hume's pseudohydrostatic model of the passions offers a constantly repeated, self-producing ebb and flow of the motivation to work, as idleness precipitates the desire to work which in turn produces desire for idleness, and so on. In contrast to this, Smith's subject is constantly exercised by a desire for self-betterment. Structured as it is around an animating principle that defines life to the extent of being characteristic of human nature itself, Smith's somaeconomics could be described, in contrast to Hume's mechanist motivations, as vitalist. For Smith, the human is defined in terms of the desire for self-betterment: One's very constitution as a subject therefore leads inexorably to work. The economy's vital force then is not simply an analogy but a literal force located by somaeconomics within the human subject.³⁵

Smith's theory of the motivational force that drives the economic subject develops from an extensive consideration in his moral philosophy of the subject's desire for objects. As Guillory has shown, in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* it is the subject's "aesthetic disposition" that is the motor of the economy, and specifically, our ability to feel pleasure in an object is not due, as we might think, to the convenience that it offers, but more precisely to the beauty of the fitness by which its convenience is brought about.³⁶ In Guillory's words, "Commodities are attractive . . . not simply because they can be used to satisfy needs, but because they possess an aesthetic dimension, because their 'fitness' to use can be admired."³⁷

But this aesthetic impulse at the hearts of economic subjects is soon given a somewhat darker cast, to emerge as a form of self-deception. Our desire for self-betterment, the constant driving force of the economy, is in part fueled by our looking at the conveniences enjoyed by those better off than ourselves, for instance in the houses and living arrangements of the rich. Our imaginations are stimulated by the apparent ease enjoyed in such lives, but they are also “confounded”: They confuse the “satisfaction itself” afforded by a thing, with the “order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system” by means of which it is produced.³⁸ We are similarly deluded in the desires that motivate our consumption: We load ourselves with trinkets whose provision of some minor convenience is outweighed by the inconvenience of owning them—the labor of possessing them outweighs the saving in “toil and trouble” that they represent.³⁹ If such objects symbolize, or materialize, our self-betterment, Smith shows how our desire for self-betterment entails the acquisition of its most palpable manifestation in material objects that themselves involve us in further work—the labor and inconvenience of possession; they are objects whose promise of embodied happiness is a delusion. The tragedy of such delusions is evident in the parable of the poor man’s son “whom heaven in its anger has visited with ambition,” who becomes “enchanted with the distant idea” of the various felicities of the rich man’s life, and who devotes his life to enduring endless hardships to achieve this goal.

[If] in the extremity of old age he should at last attain to it, he will find [it] to be in no respect preferable to that humble security and contentment which he had abandoned for it. It is then, in the last dregs of life, his body wasted with toil and diseases, his mind galled and ruffled by the memory of a thousand injuries and disappointments, . . . that he begins at last to find that wealth and greatness are mere trinkets of frivolous utility, no more adapted for procuring ease of body or tranquillity of mind than the tweezer-cases of the lover of toys.⁴⁰

The imagination at work here, the source of such motivational delusions, is described as an “imposition of nature,” but Smith says that it is “well that nature imposes upon us in this manner,” for this “deception” of the imagination “rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind.”⁴¹ “Nature” here is shorthand for the historical or psychological forces that

motivate the subject, in which originate the “vital force” and the “constant desire for self-betterment” that animates the worker. The natural origins of the spring of action, or vital principle, is an easily deluded imagination whose capacity to deceive us sets us on a path to constant labor, in search of the goal of the pleasure of improved convenience, which, if it proves elusive, as the parable of the poor man’s son tells us, nevertheless has the unintended consequence of producing national prosperity.

Smith’s expressions—that the imagination is an “imposition of nature” and that it is “as well that nature imposes upon us in this manner”—might also recall his description, quoted earlier, of our propensity to barter as “one of those original principles in our nature, of which no further account can be given.” Characterizing imagination as an imposition of nature, as with the account of a propensity to barter as an original principle in our nature, collapses history into nature, appearing to naturalize a historically contingent, culturally specific account of the human, so that *homo economicus*, and commercial society in general, appear as natural products of historical processes, a theoretically powerful construction produced through the combination of conjectural history and philosophical abstraction in the Scottish Enlightenment science of man.

I would like to end by unpacking the implications of Smith’s terminology of “nature” a little more, however, and to note the possibility that Smith plays with a dry irony at times in his deployment of one of the most ambiguous, if also widely used, terms in Enlightenment philosophy. Certainly the notion of an “imposition” of nature opens a space between the subject on whom nature acts and nature itself; by separating “nature” and “human nature,” nature is doubled and proliferates, but its determining power is diminished. Smith’s narrative of an “imposition” of nature, for all its stress on nature, in fact tells us that we are victims of a nature that is somehow alien or “other” to us: The very thought that we are “imposed” on by nature opens the possibility of thinking our “nature” as subjects free of such impositions. The phrase “imposition of nature” thus carries an implication that subject and nature are somehow at odds, that we are victims of nature, rather than, or in addition to, being expressions of it.

Such distancing or ironizing of nature in turn modifies the naturalistic (and potentially deterministic) parallels implicit in Smith’s model of the vital force located in the subject and, more broadly, complicates what might

be taken as the optimistic overtones of the organicist language and models present in Smith's political economy. It opens at least the theoretical possibility of an alternative subject, who, if not unmarked by nature, might at least be more capable of modifying its impositions—and indeed *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* might be understood as outlining the possibility of precisely such a project within the field of moral action. Irony's ability to proliferate two or more meanings thus makes a system that is already natural simultaneously comprehensible as a perversion of nature; via irony, nature in political economy is at once expressed and corrupted, ideal and fallen, and nature itself emerges as plural and variable rather than monolithic and determining. As well as describing a system of nature as it exists, Smith's irony—like something latent but not yet manifest in political economy's genetic code—enables a gesture toward something beyond itself, to what political economy, or human nature, or both, might yet become. In this context, it is worth remembering that the same imagination, which works in such a dark but seemingly necessary way to delude and motive the worker, is given a very different role in stimulating and sustaining ethical standards of behavior in Smith's moral theory; it is also, as we have seen, cast as a central philosophical function and is the site of the psychological and aesthetic pleasures that reward its philosophical labors.

Something of the different possible natures implicitly embedded in Smith's thinking emerge if we compare the deluded imagination of the worker with his account of the philosopher's imagination at work in system making. Such a comparison suggests that the delusions of the worker, which are the spring of action for the economic system, but which generate no pleasure for him, might be understood as an aberrant or malfunctioning version of the philosopher's imaginative appreciation of systems. For the philosopher, imagination provides pleasure, but the worker, although motivated by the desire for pleasure, is disappointed: The pleasure available to the philosopher through contemplation of his system is more easily realizable than the material pleasure sought by the worker through a life of toil. In these different kinds of labor, the natural imposition of imagination is expressed differentially, producing pleasure or happiness for the one but not the other. Meanwhile, if political economy emerges as a system of deferral of pleasure, for economic subjects at least, it is also a system for the accumulation of pleasure in its abstract, depersonalized form, if wealth, etymo-

logically derived from the Old English word *weal*, or well-being, and used by Smith as a deliberate alternative to the term "opulence," can be understood in that way. Pleasure itself is thus systematized in Smith, both in that it is the alluring object that motivates the system and in that it is ultimately accrued by the system.⁴² Smith's belief that the growth of wealth would entail rising wages could be read as an attempt to return some pleasurable value to the worker, but if, as has been argued, political economy immediately post-Smith is strongly marked by the opposition between wealth and happiness (a contradiction prominently expressed in Malthus), Smith's attempt to close the circuit and create in political economy a system productive of both wealth and happiness was not realized.⁴³ Meanwhile, if the elaboration of political economy as a natural system for the production of pleasure stalled, it has been argued that an alternative pleasure-producing system, in an entirely different genre—though one that gives equal prominence to a natural imagination—was offered in Wordsworth's poetry, whose ambitions were announced in the 1798 *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, in the same year as Malthus's first *Essay on the Principle of Population*.⁴⁴ Making the imagination and its delusions so central to the newly formulated realm of Romantic literature reorganized, in turn, the role and place of the aesthetic within emergent capitalist society.

Smith's somaeconomics offers, then, both in the deluded imagination and in the imposition of nature on the economic subject, a spring of action that is a lesser, or somehow regressive or less perfectly expressed, version of the wonder that is the generative principle of a philosophical system. The delusions of the worker's nature are the dark irony, even tragedy, at the heart of political economy, but within the genre of political economy—a genre being written simultaneously with *Wealth of Nations*—further elaboration of such aspects of the vital forces that motivate it is suppressed in favor of elaboration of the larger workings of the macrosystem whose guarantee of health has thus been secured. In this sense, political economy is produced as a genre or system that originates from but obviates the subject, whose experiences it contains, but whose pleasure it allows to be constantly deferred, and the particularities of whose experience and labor it quickly translates into larger analytical abstractions. If, to pick up on Siskin, the system of political economy is an Enlightenment genre, it is a genre where the experience of the subject is central but displaced, where the irony and tragedy

of the experience of the economic subject remain embedded but largely unelaborated. Such experiences, however, like an unexpressed gene, or, in another metaphor, a narrative possibility, remain within it, awaiting expression. It remained for Romantic narratives of the subject—or, we might equally say, narratives of the Romantic subject—that emerged in the writings of the next century, to give such possibilities voice.⁴⁵

NOTES

1. Adam Smith, unpreserved manuscript, quoted in Dugald Stewart, "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* by Adam Smith, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 322. See also Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90–91.
2. [Samuel Johnson], preface to *A New Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, ed. Richard Rolt (London, 1756), 1.
3. Stewart, "Account," 323, 322. Among the systems mentioned by Stewart are systems of rhetoric and belles lettres, systems of moral philosophy both instituted and refuted by Smith, and Smith's at times excessively systematic conversational style.
4. Adam Smith, "The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 31–105. For attempts to date this piece, which Smith described as a "juvenile" fragment, see the editors' introduction, 7–9.
5. Clifford Siskin, "Mediated Enlightenment: The System of the World," in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 165. See also his "Novels and Systems," *Novel* 34, no. 2 (2001): 202–15.
6. Siskin, "Mediated Enlightenment," 167–68; Adam Smith, Letter to the *Edinburgh Review*, in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 242–54.
7. Compare Smith's famous attack on the "man of system" added to the last edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.
8. Smith was called the "Newton" of civil society by his pupil John Millar.
9. On Newton's system of the world, see Siskin, "Mediated Enlightenment," 166.
10. Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.
11. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
12. *Ibid.*, 3.

13. See Christian Marouby's essay in this volume for a full and insightful account of Quesnay and the role of natural (biological and/or medicinal) systems in his economic thought and that of Smith. Marouby's fine essay overlaps with many of the concerns I discuss here and below.
14. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 673–74, 343; see also 466–67, 473, 496, 604–6. I repeat in this paragraph points first made in "The Physiology of Political Economy: Vitalism and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 3 (2002): 465–81; see this for further elaboration of the argument.
15. For "a certain condition in the nerves," see William Cullen, *A Letter to Lord Cathcart, President of the Board of Police in Scotland, Concerning the Recovery of Persons Drowned and Seemingly Dead* (Edinburgh, 1776), 2–3.
16. On Whytt, see R. K. French, *Robert Whytt, the Soul and Medicine* (London: Wellcome Institute, 1969), and Andrew Cunningham, "The Pen and the Sword: Recovering the Disciplinary Identity of Physiology and Anatomy before 1800. II: Old Anatomy—the Sword," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 34, no. 1 (2003): 67–68.
17. Cullen, *Letter to Lord Cathcart*.
18. Adam Smith, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 69.
19. *Ibid.*, 201.
20. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. MacFie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 265; Smith, "History of Astronomy," 66. See also Clifford Siskin, "The Problem of Periodization: Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Fate of System," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 111.
21. Peter de Bolla, "Mediation and the Division of Labor," in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 89.
22. *Ibid.*, 100.
23. *Ibid.*, 89.
24. That such language is not merely a rhetorical flourish is suggested by the repetition of the phrase "genetic code" later in the paper on page 100.
25. De Bolla, "Mediation," 95; Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 25; italics added.
26. The "invisible hand" appears in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 184–85, and *Wealth of Nations*, 456.
27. For Smith's "ironic" image of the invisible hand, the intellectual history of the image, and its afterlife, see Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), chap. 5.

28. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 312.

29. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 456.

30. This occlusion of the subject in Smith's political economy is in marked contrast with the painstaking account of individual moral consciousness and social subjectivity in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. As Mike Hill demonstrates in a comparison with E. P. Thompson's account of the moral economy of the crowd, which operates against the logic of market forces, economic subjects in Smith are always considered as isolated individuals. The question of consciousness arising within groups of workers thus never arises: the collective in Smith is the "organism" of the economy itself, not the collective of the workers. See Mike Hill, "The Crowded Text: E. P. Thompson, Adam Smith, and the Object of Eighteenth-Century Writing," *ELH* 69, no. 3 (2002): 749–73.

31. Siskin, "Problem of Periodization," 120.

32. *Ibid.*, 121, 120.

33. David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1:112–18.

34. Gallagher, *Body Economic*, 4.

35. Gallagher also makes this point in *Body Economic*, 8.

36. Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 311.

37. *Ibid.* Hume had already suggested that the utility of convenience gives pleasure, and that we feel pleasure in utility of objects that we do not possess by sympathy with their possessor. It is left for Smith to explain why the "desire for the object exceeds the gratification supplied by its use" (*ibid.*, 309).

38. *Ibid.*, 311.

39. "How many people ruin themselves by laying out money on trinkets of frivolous utility? What pleases these lovers of toys is not so much the utility, as the aptness of the machines which are fitted to promote it. . . . They walk about loaded with a multitude of baubles . . . all of which might at all times be very well spared, and of which the whole utility is certainly not worth the fatigues of bearing the burden" (Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 180).

40. *Ibid.*, 181.

41. *Ibid.*, 183.

42. Although "pleasure" may be something rather different from "happiness," it is notable that references to "happiness" appear reasonably frequently in Smith, but more often in relation to happiness as a collective good than an individual attainment.

43. See Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, "Happiness versus Wealth in Malthus and Ricardo," in *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, by Collini, Winch, and

Burrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Malthus questions Smith's identification of increases in national wealth with improvements in the happiness and comfort of the mass of society. For Smith, a growth in wealth would bring rising wages; Malthus feared the standard of living might fall despite the growth of wealth.

44. Clifford Siskin, "The Year of the System," in 1798: *The Year of the Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Richard Cronin (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 9–28.

45. See Gallagher's suggestion that literature, one of the "competing" organicisms of the nineteenth century, gave political economy a "sustained encounter with the states of vitality it invented but failed to explore fully" (Gallagher, *Body Economic*, 4, 6).

**Vitalism's Revolution: John Thelwall, Life,
and the Economy of Radical Politics**

Richard A. Barney

John Thelwall—Jacobin activist, firebrand orator, and literary nonconformist of late-eighteenth-century Britain—had nothing less than a remarkable career of personal and professional turbulence. It is a story now increasingly familiar to eighteenth-century scholars, given a revival of critical interest since the 1990s regarding his political biography and multifarious interests. Born in 1764 to a family of silk merchants, Thelwall trained in the business but declined to choose it as his trade; after beginning and abruptly ending studies in divinity, he entered the study of law but ultimately refused to pursue that career in favor of becoming an author of poetry, speeches, expository prose, and fiction, as well as serving as the occasional editor of several popular periodicals such as the *Champion* and the *Monthly Magazine*.

In the wake of revolutionary events in France in 1789, Thelwall described himself as “intoxicated with the French doctrines of the day,”¹ a turning point that launched his lifelong public notoriety as a prominent member of the Corresponding Society and public speaker in favor of radical reform in

Britain. During these politically formative years, Thelwall also developed an avid interest in medical science, attending lectures at Guy's and St. Thomas Hospitals for at least two years, and articulating his own brand of medical vitalism that would ultimately inform his political rhetoric. After he was arrested (along with Thomas Hardy and Horne Tooke) and unsuccessfully tried for treason in 1794, Thelwall attempted to resume his role as political lecturer, but in the face of mounting governmental pressures and volatile public reaction (including riots), he withdrew from politics in 1798 for a brief turn of living in the countryside and concentrating on his poetry. This, however, would not prove to be the end of his calling as public figure: In the last decades of his life Thelwall committed himself to a new mission of curing children's speech impediments. It was a project that entailed founding a school for the afflicted in London, developing a methodology of treatment and oratorical training, and promoting public education and support for its operation by way of a new round of public speaking. Since the poor were his primary beneficiaries, and poetry formed a centerpiece of his approach for both their physiological rehabilitation and moral improvement, Thelwall had found new ground for combining his political with his literary sympathies, and he remained an itinerant lecturer on the subject of this medico-political venture until his death in 1834.

This sketch of Thelwall's varied career captures his striking penchant for dramatic self-reinvention, but it also suggests the boldness by which he often combined fields of interest or inquiry in shaping his public persona as both author and reformer. Recent scholarly interest has produced valuable studies of various aspects of Thelwall's career, including his role as the bane of the loyalist cause, his tentative, sometimes perplexing relationship to the Romantic poets Coleridge and Wordsworth, and his turn to speech therapy activism at the end of his career.² Thelwall's aim to articulate a substantial link between vitalist medicine and radical politics, the main focus of this essay, has also received attention from scholars such as Michael Scrivener, James Allard, and Catherine Packham. This strain of discussion emerges not only from Thelwall's brief stint in medical training, but also from his invitation in 1793 to present a lecture on vitalism that aggressively revised John Hunter's well-known views on the blood's vitality; it was a presentation that proved a sensation for its conceptual boldness, resulting in

the publication that same year of a treatise titled *An Essay towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*.

It was this episode of Thelwall's career as public figure, Michael Scrivener points out, that led him to think of himself as what Scrivener calls a "political physician" who was committed to diagnosing the ills of the British condition, a perspective Nicholas Roe shares in describing Thelwall after 1793 as a "hybrid physician-politician-poet."³ Whereas James Allard has also offered significant evidence for the ways that Thelwall's medical study informed his characterization of the body politic as potentially harmonious, Catherine Packham has provided the most rigorous account to date of what she calls the profound "transference of vitality from scientific discourse into political rhetoric" during Thelwall's writing during the 1780s and '90s.⁴ In Packham's description, Thelwall's keen interest in medical experiments aiming to revivify apparently dead corpses came to organize his portrayal of Britain as a moribund or virtually deceased political entity whose democratic impulses could be revived and powerfully expanded in newly egalitarian ways. In this essay I want to extend particularly Packham's observations toward a biopolitical analysis by drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and the Italian philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito in order both to offer a broader context for Thelwall's hybrid project and to examine in more specific detail the conceptual mechanism for the "transference" Packham identifies. That transfer, to be sure, was more than the result of the sheer audacity of Thelwall's intellectual eclecticism, and the focus of this analysis will be Thelwall's novel titled *The Peripatetic*, published in 1793, the same year as his *Essay*. It is a part of his oeuvre that has been comparatively less examined, and it best exemplifies the earliest ways that Thelwall articulated the concrete application of his more abstract biomedical and political principles.

Thelwall's work in general, in fact, poses a unique opportunity for re-configuring biopolitical arguments that have emerged until now, since the discussions by Foucault, Agamben, and Esposito regarding the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have stressed what Foucault called "biopower," which he described as entailing the application of discipline and so-called "security" in the political management of a population's biological productivity. By contrast, Thelwall's antiestablishment posture offers us the challenge of engaging with the other side of things—with, that is, the ways that

biopolitics could be reimagined for the purposes of radically reinventing the status quo. This challenge is posed for both current and eighteenth-century contexts. On the one hand, Thelwall's work requires rethinking the theoretical and historical frameworks articulated by Foucault and his fellow philosophers, since it draws, for instance, on the emerging regimes of medical analysis, economic calculus, and sovereign reconfiguration that they describe, while it also turns those instruments in the direction of substantially enfranchising the working poor. On the other hand, the slant of Thelwall's claims also contests the biopolitical implications of specific arguments by his conservative contemporaries, most notably Edmund Burke, who—by far the most knowledgeable about medical science among his loyalist counterparts—draws on his expertise in biomedicine in order to give scientific substance to a common metaphor of the 1790s that characterized the English nation as a vulnerable body politic requiring strenuous defending against the “contagion” of French Revolutionary ideas.⁵ By contrast, as one of Burke's most energetic antagonists, Thelwall drew on vitalist principles, as we shall see, in order to characterize the British nation-state as a political entity fundamentally open to the beneficial stimuli of vigorous debate and radical reform.

How, then, does Thelwall conceive of the connection between the “bio” and the “political” in late-eighteenth-century biopolitics? The crux for that political dynamic can be found in the “economic” broadly conceived, more specifically in the form of what Agamben calls the “theological-economic-providential paradigm.”⁶ In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, where Agamben traces the history in early Christian theology of the notion of God's management of the world's order—in Greek, called *oikonomia*—we encounter a concept of providential government with far-reaching implications for later adaptations, such as in the case of the emergence of political economy as a distinct analytical field during the Enlightenment, about which Agamben makes some relatively brief, but nonetheless suggestive, remarks. For our purposes here, I want to stress *oikonomia*'s enduring legacy as a form of mediation in both theological and secular contexts. In the case of Augustine's description of God's ordering of the world, for example, Agamben explains that *oikonomia* bridges the gap between God's being, which has inherent order, and the immanent orderliness produced by his governing activity. As Agamben puts it, “Immanent and transcendent order . . . refer back to each

other in a paradoxical coincidence, which can nevertheless be understood only as a perpetual *oikonomia*, as a continuous activity of government of the world, one that implies a fracture between being and praxis and, at the same time, tries to heal it" (89).

When Agamben turns to consider how "economic theology" operates later in the secular context of Rousseau's description of the republic, he comments that

what was needed to assure the unity of being and divine action, reconciling the unity of substance with the trinity of persons and the government of particulars with the universality of providence, has here the strategic function of reconciling the sovereignty and generality of the law with the public economy and the effective government of individuals. (276)

Fully "reconciling" these inherent divisions, however, proves less the final result than installing a form of provisional mediation that can also be understood—in supplementing Agamben's analysis—to support a modern arrangement where new discoveries in the biological sciences—including botany, anatomy, and physiology—could be speculatively sutured to ever-enlarging goals of political organization. This is to say that, rather than mediate between being and praxis, in the case of eighteenth-century biopolitics "economy" negotiates a tentative relation between biological potentiality and political practicality, without ever consolidating, however, a complete identity of their respective spheres.

This essay explores the implications of that scenario in the context of both Thelwall's vitalism and *The Peripatetic*, which, taken together, articulate the early stages of both the theoretical and practical elements of his bio-economic-political project. *The Peripatetic* is a peculiar text that is something like a novel while also composed of multifarious genres, modes, and styles. Its narrative documents the episodic story of its fictional protagonist, named Sylvanus Theophrastus, who travels the countryside surrounding London as he accumulates an appreciation for the landscape's sublime beauties, the use of natural resources for agriculture and industry, and the everyday life of common people. In the course of this story, Thelwall certainly draws on economy in the narrower sense of financial exchange and management, since for him, they provide the network by which the raw resource of human bodies capable of labor is incorporated into the larger assemblage

of British sociopolitical hegemony. As Theophrastus remarks in a poem on “commerce”—his term of choice for economic activity both at home and abroad in the colonies—it is both a “doubtful” and “partial good” because while it may “swell [the nation] to Wealth and Power,” it also forms the basis for monopolies on goods, the abuse of laborers, and the “poison’d stream of Luxury.”⁷ Gregory Claeys is no doubt correct in saying that Thelwall’s conception of the economy in *The Peripatetic* is tinged with a pastoral idealism that is in contrast to a more complex formulation of labor rights that can be found in later texts such as *The Tribune* (1795–96).⁸ My interest here, however, is how a significantly broader sense of economy also serves in *The Peripatetic* to anchor the development of Thelwall’s entire political project, providing the means by which to reimagine existing political structures by reconfiguring life as biological and economic fact. With that in mind, my primary claim is that Thelwall’s formulation of “life” as vital organism sponsors a version of radical theory and practice that constitutes a profoundly open political arrangement, which depends on a general economy producing a cycle of both systemic failure and recalibrated animation. I begin with Thelwall’s version of vitalism, before turning to its aesthetic and political implications.

First, Thelwall’s vitalism. In his essay on animal vitality, while professing almost obsequious admiration for John Hunter’s medical authority, Thelwall in fact attacked his view that the blood inherently housed life’s vital essence. Hunter, a Glasgow-born autodidact who became a celebrated London surgeon and physician to George III, had a career-long preoccupation with what he called the “life principle,” whose existence could be pinpointed in the blood’s function, a view that he promulgated in lectures (to which Thelwall had access via student notes) and that was published in the posthumous text *Treatise on the Blood* in 1794.⁹ In the process of rejecting the blood as life’s ultimate source and criticizing inconsistencies in Hunter’s argument, Thelwall proposes an alternative model of organic form and its vital activation. Early in the *Essay*, Thelwall remarks: “Wherever there is a perfect organization of the animal substance, there, I conceive, we have the *susceptibility* (or . . . the Pre-disposing Cause) of Life.”¹⁰ Some pages later, he continues:

Life . . . in the animal . . . is *that state of action, by which the functions, or any of the functions of the animal, are carried on. . . . Previous to the existence of life, the body*

must have attained a Specific Organization; and that Life, or in other terms, the Vital Action, is induced by the application of proper stimuli: thus, then, life in the animal is that state of action (induced by specific stimuli upon matter specifically organized), by which the animal functions. (38)

In these terms, the sequence producing life requires first, a specific “harmony” of material parts, which constitutes, second, matter’s crucial “susceptibility” in readiness for its third stage of being stimulated into vital action. What is that stimulus? In the particular case of human or animal physiology, Thelwall argues, it is a component in the air absorbed by the lungs and distributed by the blood to the entire corpus: It is what he calls “a fine and subtile, or aëriform essence” (36) that is in the air and that he hypothesizes is the “electrical fluid” (41), as he calls it, which so fascinated contemporary vitalists of all kinds.

In offering this description, Thelwall effectively sidestepped a well-known vitalist controversy regarding exactly where the origin of life derived—either from outside matter, delivered ultimately by divine agency, or from within it, as the manifestation of an inherent vital force.¹¹ The first position, sometimes called “transcendentalist” by medical historians, typically tracked conventional theological views, whereas the second position, often termed “immanentist,” pursued the often-maligned “materialist” perspective.¹² Even in terms of immanence, there are potentially two scenarios suggested by Thelwall’s description: Life could function either as an organic or machinic whole formed by regular interactions or, alternatively, as a series of contingent encounters out of which it is constituted and finally deconstituted. These ambiguities no doubt account at least in part for the enthusiasm by which his arguments were received by the members of the Physical Society, who first heard the *Essay*’s claims and who seem not to have felt it necessary to choose between their own transcendentalist or materialist leanings. In any case, the primary point to stress here is that Thelwall’s position is only partially immanentist, since for him, only some matter holds life’s vital essence, which could be found in the atmosphere. As a consequence, for him, human beings as a form of specific organization require more than mere sustenance by way of food as part of their sensory interaction with the outside world because ultimately, they are far more crucially reliant on exteriority for the very spark of life itself (from traditional perspectives) or for a

profound systemic dependency (from the materialist view). In this sense, the respiratory organs, including the lungs, serve as the most important bodily aperture, thereby constituting the human being as a radically open system—both physiologically and, as we shall see, sociopolitically. That is why, in a fascinating chapter of *The Peripatetic* called “A Digression for the Anatomists,” Thelwall identifies his anatomical holy triumvirate as the brain, heart, and lungs; their intimate physiological connection indicates that to the brain’s function of rationality and the heart’s of feeling, the lungs added the essential feature of vital receptivity—or, what Thelwall calls “susceptibility,” which is the fundamental openness to external stimuli that could include imaginative inspiration, personal interaction, or social exchange.¹³

This image of openness brings us back to the problem of revolutionary “contagion,” while it also suggests that Thelwall’s physio-political scenario anticipates Roberto Esposito’s more recent discussion of how to reformulate what he considers a signal feature of modern biopolitics since the Enlightenment: the application of the logic of immunization to the process of political management, regulation, and self-protection. The immunization paradigm, as Esposito calls it, operates on the paradoxical premise that while the nation is a self-contained—and therefore closed—sociopolitical unit, it is constantly under threat by forces that work their way into that unit by way of external, menacing origins. As such, the paradigm for Esposito constitutes one of the West’s most volatile and damaging legacies, since its emphasis on the maintenance of borders against external influences largely identified as potential threats has produced, he claims, frequently lethal consequences ranging from eighteenth-century warfare to twentieth- and twenty-first-century genocide.¹⁴ It is no mere coincidence, then, that the loyalist rhetoric surrounding Thelwall during the 1790s was rife with the language of disease, contagion, and its summary elimination as a response to what was transpiring in France. Edmund Burke, as just one example, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, would caustically declare to his imaginary French reader:

Your affairs, in spite of us, are made a part of our interest; so far at least as to keep at a distance your panacea, or your plague. If it be panacea, we do not want it. We know the consequences of unnecessary physic. If it be a plague; it is such a plague, that the precautions of the most severe quarantine ought to be established against it.¹⁵

As one of Burke's strongest critics, including in *The Peripatetic*, Thelwall makes his fictional protagonist, Theophrastus, keenly attuned to how the defensive, closed system of British law, economics, and politics was also hostile at home not only to those like Thelwall promoting radical reform, but also to its less privileged citizens in the general population. His many targets in the course of the book include the law's rapacious abuse of the disadvantaged while refusing any kind of emendation; the practice by supercilious estate owners of ejecting poorer tenants whose ramshackle cottages were a distasteful eyesore; and the predations of the so-called "Association"—whose full title was The Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers—which used all manner of spying and political strong-arming to intimidate reformed-minded Britons.¹⁶ As one of Theophrastus's similarly minded friends declares: "The system, my friend! the system is alone to blame, which throws every advantage into the hands of the wealthy few, at the expence of the entire depression of the many" (140).

That lament suggests how we might fine-tune Agamben's sense of the economic during the eighteenth century, since in noting that political economy was called "the science of order" (281), Agamben stresses the notion of "order" as economic theology's primary value. He includes in this account Adam Smith's famous image of a barely secularized agency he called "the invisible hand," which presumably managed otherwise free-flowing economic relations. For Smith, Thelwall, and many of their contemporaries, however, the term of choice for describing comprehensive order was in fact *system*. It was a term that gained increasing use over the course of the eighteenth century in Great Britain, to the point that, as Clifford Siskin explains, *system* became less a term than a full-blown genre, and this despite the frequent association of system with the politics in France during the 1790s. The conventions of system as genre, he argues, became disseminated in discourses including medicine, political economy (especially in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*), ethics, and even literary criticism, with an increasing arc of popularity well into the nineteenth century.¹⁷

The language of system saturates Thelwall's physiological descriptions, his economic commentary, and his political diagnoses, thereby articulating the underlying logic by which the elements of bio-economic-political organization could be synchronized. Thus if specific organization in the *Essay*

makes an organism ready for systematic vitality, then its counterpart in *The Peripatetic* is the way Thelwall imagines the possibility of personal consistency and equitable politics. We are told that one friend of Theophrastus, for instance, intervenes at any opportunity on behalf of abused individuals because he had “a systematic aversion to every species of Oppression” (114). We are also told, however, that this friend’s “philosophy sometimes bends a little to his indignation” (114)—an indication that his belief system is subject to emotional excesses or inconsistencies of application that will subject that very system to reexamination and revision. In this sense, for Thelwall, system poses both the promise and the problem of articulating a sound economy of biopolitical relations. It is therefore no coincidence that in one of his most strenuous condemnations of the British status quo, Thelwall inverts Smith’s famous image to denounce what he calls “the clenched hand” of elite privilege.¹⁸

As Thelwall’s theory of vitalism already suggests, the solution was not system’s elimination, but its recalibration as an open network able to implement what could be called a politics of susceptibility—both in form and content. In terms of content, Esposito’s account of open systems strikes several similar notes regarding the constitution of vulnerable selfhood and its relation to others. If, in a closed system, he explains, the unit in question—such as the self or social group—is conceived as a monolithic “spatial entity protected by strict genetic boundaries” that prompt an aggressive posture toward outside elements, then the open system, whether biological or sociopolitical, functions as a body replete with what Esposito calls “structural aporias,” which can deflect the violence of immunitary response by eliding the difference between inside and outside, and by simultaneously promoting a nuanced kind of self-other coordination.¹⁹ Esposito draws on a number of scientific and theoretical sources to chart his version of open systematicity, including Donna Haraway’s account of “biotechnics,” Gilles Deleuze’s discussions of “partial” or rhizomatic structures, and recent biomedical research that stresses the human immune system’s complex accommodations of, rather than merely hostile reaction to, external biological agents.²⁰ For our purposes here, perhaps the most telling aspect of Esposito’s argument emerges when, in drawing on the work of the biomedical philosopher Allen Tauber, he characterizes the human body as “an ecosystem that has evolved over time into what [Tauber] . . . describes as a ‘social

community.”²¹ While tracking substantially different philosophical trajectories, Thelwall’s and Esposito’s perspectives nonetheless converge on several themes linking the biological to the sociopolitical, including the importance of porous embodiment, productive susceptibility, and ecological collaboration.

In Thelwall’s case, a good example of the politics of susceptibility appears in Theophrastus’s account of a trip he made as a younger man and legal agent to collect payment from a poor rural family for a delinquent debt. On the way to their home, Theophrastus is profoundly struck with the spectacular beauty of the area, so much so that, even after he is caught in a shower, the “whole face of the universe instantly smiled more glorious” (126). Theophrastus also describes an earlier visit, when the family’s unsuspecting invitation to eat a meal with them causes him severe embarrassment because, he reports, “my heart smote me at the bare idea: the whole system of intellectual nature seemed to revolt within me” (127). Their genial hospitality prompts him to defer accomplishing his task, apparently never to complete it, a decision whose justness is affirmed all the more by the aesthetic edification of the countryside he experiences in the subsequent trip to the same household. In short, Thelwall records here the integral coordination—that is, the systemic interplay—of natural environment, empathic response, and moral enlightenment in order to document Theophrastus’s arrival at a new sense of economic and legal justice.

Significantly, *The Peripatetic* registers susceptibility not only by documenting Theophrastus’s meandering excursions in the countryside but also by modeling it in the text’s own peculiar structure. What are some of those registers? There is Theophrastus’s reveling in constant dialogue, what he calls “converse,” and social exchange. There is the central motif of what he also terms “wandering,” “straying,” or veering off in new directions, which characterizes Theophrastus’s self-confessed predilection, Tristram Shandy-style, to distraction, as well as Thelwall’s conception of scientific inquiry. In this regard, it is significant that in the *Essay*, Thelwall tells his readers that he does not “profess to delineate a perfect system” (3), since “The Anatomical Physiologist is frequently left to wander in the regions of conjecture” (3) and “may frequently be *compelled* to wander in the gloom of doubt and negation” (32). Similarly, *The Peripatetic* is a three-volume, sprawlingly hybrid text, a miscellany of modes and genres including fiction, pastoral po-

etry, odes, satire, travelogue, and sociopolitical treatise—all as part of an ethos of new discovery, contingent positioning, and mutual systemic disruption.²² In this sense, Theophrastus's emphasis on sympathy between himself and other characters does not operate within the framework of relatively insular subjectivity as found in Adam Smith's influential description, but instead functions as a radically unsettling susceptibility on par with the immediate, irresistible relays of networked physiological response.

As Judith Thompson has pointed out, Thelwall's penchant for a multifarious aesthetic has significant social and political implications, particularly regarding the need to generate new forms from old ones.²³ With that in mind, I want to explore in detail two areas where *The Peripatetic's* open-ended ecology is particularly striking—one that is related to the significance of the picturesque and another that pertains to sovereignty.

The first case regards the text's pervasive mention of the importance of "variety" or the "variegated." Theophrastus repeatedly cites variety as an essential quality of the natural scenery he describes, such as "the most beautiful variety" of the morning sky (126), the "variety of heaths, and tufted vales" (126), and the "sweet . . . succession of variegated notes" of the lark's song (127). A further clue to variety's significance appears when Theophrastus waxes rhapsodic about the larger phenomenon of the universe's design; he remarks that "the more complicated the object of our examination may appear, the more forcibly it proclaims the wisdom of its Author; and the more irresistibly are we compelled to admire the simplicity of operation, on which all true sublimity depends; and which, in the midst of variety and apparent complication, never fails to present itself to the scientific eye" (146). That variety pertains both to the beautiful and the sublime, thereby signaling the extent of its symbolic importance, and in this context, Thelwall has anticipated Uvedale Price's famous argument regarding the picturesque, which, one year after the publication of *The Peripatetic*, Price would describe as "hold[ing] a station between beauty and sublimity," while being primarily constituted by what he called "variety and intricacy."²⁴

Unlike Price, however, Thelwall attributes to variety much more than a revisioning of aesthetic categories, since in *The Peripatetic*, it encapsulates not only the text's forays in generic multiplicity or digressive narration, but also Thelwall's emphatic sense that genuinely attending to variety means accounting for the socially or politically insignificant—such as the unemployed

haymaker whom Theophrastus encounters, gypsies, the financially prostrate farmer, or the destitute single mother of several children. The simplicity that Theophrastus invokes regarding the sublime has its counterpart in formulating a coherent perspective on various kinds of suffering, penury, and mistreatment that were a central part of England's otherwise prosperous socioeconomy, with an eye toward producing genuine variety by way of projecting a future political arrangement that would accommodate English citizens at all levels of need or ability. A truly various English system, therefore, would be one that operated constantly on the principle of biopolitical susceptibility that *The Peripatetic* enacts throughout its pages.

The political stakes of variegation become all the more palpable when we consider the issue of sovereignty, since Theophrastus displaces conventional notions of sovereign power into a diverse range of ecological and social registers. This move is particularly significant, since in historical terms, it can serve as one benchmark for measuring the by now well-known disagreement about sovereignty that has emerged from the arguments of Foucault and Agamben. If for Foucault, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marked the decline of traditional, royal sovereignty in favor of the new mechanisms of discipline and "security," then for Agamben, that decline never took place, since in his terms, a secularized redefinition of sovereign potentiality has continued to function well into the early twenty-first century. In the case of Thelwall, by contrast, we have the opportunity of finding out just where sovereignty "goes" in the Jacobin project of rejecting monarchical power in favor of alternative arrangements—if only as the projected possibilities of Theophrastus's febrile imagination.

On the one hand, given Theophrastus's antipathy for absolute monarchs, *The Peripatetic* may seem to square with Foucault's narrative of sovereign decline in the wake of the emergence of new disciplinary apparatuses and mechanisms of control for the population at large. On the other hand, however, Thelwall's text could also represent a tendency to resist that narrative since, as we will see, Theophrastus generally tends to stress a relocation of the kind of sovereign power usually associated with monarchs, rather than its simple declension or removal. That said, the most important point of contact here is Foucault's remark in *Security, Territory, Population* that in the remaking of sovereignty during the 1700s, the question of "multiplicities" became paramount—the challenge posed by a newly understood multifari-

ousness of spaces, individuals, constituencies, and modes of political management.²⁵ In the context of Thelwall's revolutionary bent, it is all the more significant that Foucault remarks that in crossing what elsewhere he calls "society's 'threshold of modernity,'" European nations during this period grappled with an unprecedented heterogeneity of not only the subjects to be ruled and the methods to be employed but also the various ways that dissidence, struggle, and revolt could become manifest.²⁷

With regard to Agamben, there emerges an important difference between his and Thelwall's accounts of the economic as system or order, as well as its implications for sovereignty. For Agamben, the dynamics of economic theology reveal that "the real problem, the central mystery of politics is not sovereignty, but government; it is not God, but the angel; it is not the king, but ministry; . . . —that is to say, the governmental machine that they form and support" (276). As he elaborates on this distinction further, however, it appears that there are in fact two different versions of sovereignty in question: As he remarks, "*The two sovereignties, the dynastic and the popular-democratic, refer to two completely different genealogies. The dynastic sovereignty of divine right is derived from the theological-political paradigm; the popular-democratic is derived from the theological-economic-providential paradigm*" (276–77). Either way we may consider the issue—with sovereignty being moot or constituted by what we might call the "sovereignty of the system"—Agamben's distinction seems less ironclad for Thelwall's treatment of things in *The Peripatetic*. This is because first, for Thelwall, the indispensable need to be suspicious of the system's economy produces a recurring imperative to confront and revise sovereignty's designation, and second, his characterization of desirable sovereignty often stresses its function along the lines of a monarch in action.

Unsurprisingly, in *The Peripatetic* Theophrastus proves no friend to English kings or queens—or, for that matter, monarchs of any stripe. In the course of his traveling meditations, he omits practically no monarch from his catalogue of English political abuse and misguided self-aggrandizement. We hear, for instance, about "the two tyrant daughters"—Mary and Elizabeth—"of that inhuman voluptuary, Henry VIII," as well as about the "national folly" of Charles II (100). One of his characteristic strategies is to visit the dilapidated monuments of royal ambition—formerly grand palaces or imposing castles—in order to interpret them not as evidence of England's

past glories, but as the detritus of royal indulgence that should be discarded once and for all. What is surprising, however, is how Theophrastus constructs a positive sense of sovereign power for new political possibilities. Rather than grapple with the problem of how the people might now constitute legitimate power, Theophrastus instead invests nature itself with an instructive kind of sovereignty whose features are recognizably like those of monarchs. The best example of an extended meditation on alternative sovereignty appears in his poem on the moon as the “Queen” of the night’s “pensive Visions” (106). Those visions are produced under her care as a beneficial alternative to the stultifying mentality produced by what Theophrastus calls earlier the “children of domestic uniformity” (105). By contrast to the oppressiveness of a dominating sovereign, the moon serves here as a “nurse of thought!” whose “thought-subliming ray,/ . . . wake[s] the seraph power that wings the soul/To heights unthought amidst the garish day” (106). In the end, the moon fulfills a variety of supportive roles, since in addition to nurturing thought, she is the object of Theophrastus’s erotic attentions: “Placid Queen,” he tells her, “Thee will I woo, while solemn Silence reigns” (106). And if that hint of sexuality goes by unnoticed, then in commenting on his poem afterward, Theophrastus declares: “I may not improperly be said to have had for some years what the critics and witlings . . . may call *an affair with the moon*” (106).

The end result of Thelwall’s recalibration of sovereign authority, however, goes further than merely dressing it in a feminine guise with admittedly very traditional garb. On the one hand, Theophrastus shapes an image of gentle sovereignty by attributing to it the traditional female roles of being both nurturing (as caring mother) and seducible (as sensual lover). On the other hand, however, and on a much broader scale, he ultimately generates what could be called a thoroughgoing *distribution* of sovereignty into all corners of the natural sphere. In the poem just discussed, for example, while the moon goes about her ministrations, “solemn Silence reigns” (106), and only a few pages earlier, the sun appears as “glorious regent of the day” (101). The proliferation of the points of sovereign authority—sun, moon, silence, wind, storm, and so forth—verges on producing a panoply of authority so disseminated as to become chaotic, were it not for the subtending support of Nature as the reliable system whose simplicity undergirds a network of mutually susceptible exchanges.²⁸ There are several occasions

when Theophrastus affirms that this natural order is part of a larger framework of Providence—as a kind of *oikonomia*—thereby serving as the ultimate sovereignty, the very form of God's reign. Those moments include, as we saw earlier, his reverential description of the “wisdom of the Author” in the perfection of nature's sublimity, which articulates, he elaborates further, “Nature's genuine theologic lore” (146). And although Theophrastus's piety here sounds a strange note by contrast with Thelwall's own reputation as an atheist during his lifetime, from an Agambenian perspective, that distinction matters far less than remembering that the legacy of theological patterns persists in even the most secular of “economic” descriptions.²⁹

Despite the palpable signs of that providential legacy, however, the slant of *The Peripatetic* nonetheless aims to resist and disrupt its potentially stultifying implications. In the end, the construction of a deliberately uneven and asymmetrical span of sovereignty constitutes no overarching theory of republican sovereignty, unless one thinks of theorizing as Thelwall does—as the speculative meandering among several possibilities in an effort to accumulate the pieces of a final, holistic framework. What is more, while the multiple attributions of sovereign authority suggest the contours of a variegated space of spontaneous empowerment, there is also an important temporal dimension to Thelwall's scheme for the work as a whole. The specific dynamics of *The Peripatetic*, that is, ultimately postpone a final arrival at systemic totalization, concentrating instead on the process of the speculative journey. In that process, one sovereign designation must be followed by another, one system displaced by its successor, in a perpetual cycle of assembly, disassembly, and recalibration, each phase couched distinctly by its particular generic context, social situation, or political target.

This brings us back to Catherine Packham's observations regarding Thelwall's preoccupation with the trope of revivification, something she does not explore in *The Peripatetic*, although its pattern is manifestly evident, such as in the moment when Theophrastus, for instance, reports in a moment of personal trauma that “the system I had been taught” has seemed to become nonsense (109), before he is able to rally and rejuvenate his faith in pursuing a reformist social mission. Even more dramatically, there is also Belmour, one of his traveling companions, who at the end of the story seems to have committed suicide by throwing himself off a precipice in a fit of despair, only to be found, a few pages later, physically intact as though

miraculously brought back from the dead and, more important, now mentally reinforced to face life's tribulations. In this second case, Thelwall is poking fun even at himself regarding the prospect of rejuvenation no matter what the circumstances, personal or otherwise. Hence the fictionality of projected revival is revealed in the very act of deploying it for the purpose of reform. The paradoxical result of this irony—an endpoint that should be no surprise to us given Thelwall's penchant for antithetical declarations of all kinds—is that a system must be constructed but also ultimately exploded, its terms continually reexamined and regenerated. It is for this reason that in Thelwall's biopolitical terms, revolution entails the reanimation of the otherwise moribund body politic—but always with a difference. Revolution, in other words, never turns on the premise of being merely what it was at the start.

NOTES

1. Thomas Seccombe, "John Thelwall," *Dictionary of National Biography* 56 (1885–1900), III.

2. For discussions of Thelwall's political career during the 1790s, see, e.g., John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 366–401; Geoffrey Bindman, "John Thelwall: A Free Man Confronts the Law," *Romanticism* 16, no. 2 (2010): 115–19; Nancy E. Johnson, "Fashioning the Legal Subject: Narratives from the London Treason Trials of 1794," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no. 3 (2009): 413–43; Michael Scrivener, "John Thelwall and the Revolution of 1649," in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650–1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119–32; and Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

On Thelwall's relation to literary Romanticism, see Michael Murphy, "John Thelwall, Coleridge, and *The Ancient Mariner*," *Romanticism* 8, no. 1 (2002): 62–74; Nicholas Roe, "Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey," in *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, ed. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 60–80; Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Thompson, "'Thy Power to Declare': Thelwall, Coleridge, and the Politics of Collaboration," *Romanticism* 16, no. 2 (2010): 164–83.

Thelwall's venture in speech therapy has been discussed by Judith Felson Duchan, "John Thelwall's Elocutionary Practices," *Romanticism* 16, no. 2 (2010): 191–96; and Andrew McCann, "Romantic Self-Fashioning: John Thelwall and the Science of Elocution," *Studies in Romanticism* 40, no. 2 (2001): 215–32.

3. Michael Scrivener, "John Thelwall and the Press," in *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 123; Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 180.

4. See James Robert Allard, "John Thelwall and the Politics of Medicine," *European Romantic Review* 15, no. 1 (2004): 73–87; and Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 142.

5. The widespread tropes of disease and infection for describing the threat of revolutionary France can be found, for instance, in texts such as John Somers Cocks, *Patriotism and the Love of Liberty Defended* (1791), 7:25–26; William Atkinson, *A Concise Sketch of the Intended Revolution, in England* (1794), 8:194, 196; and the anonymous *Loyalty Necessary to Self Preservation; or, An Antidote against the Baneful Influence of Republican Doctrines* (1798), 8:280; all in *Political Writing of the 1790s*, ed. Gregory Claeys (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995). For an account of Burke's drawing on biomedical models in order to make his political arguments in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and the later *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, see my "Burke, Biomedicine, and Biobelligerence," *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 54, no. 2 (2013): 231–43.

6. Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 277; hereafter cited in text.

7. John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic; or, Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 93; hereafter cited in text.

8. See Gregory Claeys, "The Origins of the Rights of Labor: Republicanism, Commerce, and the Construction of Modern Social Theory in Britain, 1796–1805," *Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 2 (1994): 249–90; he elaborates further on this thesis in his introduction to *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Gregory Claeys (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), xxxv–lvi. For the broader context of Thelwall's arguments, see Iain Hampsher-Monk, "John Thelwall and the Eighteenth-Century Radical Response to Political Economy," *Historical Journal* 34, no. 1 (1991): 1–20. See also Andrew McCann's argument for Thelwall's anticipation of Marxian themes in "Politico-Sentimentality: John Thelwall, Literary Production and the Critique of Capital in the 1790s," *Romanticism* 3, no. 1 (1997): 35–52.

9. For accounts of Hunter's vitalist views, particularly in the context of Thelwall's response, see Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 111–21; and Allard, "John Thelwall and the Politics of Medicine," 75–78.

10. John Thelwall, *An Essay, Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (London: 1793), 12; hereafter cited in text.

11. Packham calls this move a "clever balancing act between, or reconciliation of, these opposed positions" (*Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 126). My argument here pursues the first possibility.

12. On this opposition, see L. S. Jacyna, "Immanence or Transcendence: Theories of Life and Organization in Britain, 1790–1835," *Isis* 74, no. 3 (1983): 310–29; and Philip F. Rehbock, "Transcendental Anatomy," in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. 153–58.

13. John Thelwall's "A Digression for the Anatomists" can be found on pp. 145–49 of *The Peripatetic*. Theophrastus cites "susceptibility" on p. 147, a theme he stresses repeatedly, especially in affiliation with both "sympathy" and "sensibility"; see, e.g., 113, 166, 255, 269, 297, 373.

14. Roberto Esposito describes the "immunization" or "immunitary" paradigm particularly in *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 45–77; and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 7–8. He has explored various aspects of so-called open systems in several texts, including: *Bios*, 146–94; and *Immunitas*, 165–77.

15. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 185.

16. Thelwall's critique of the Association—especially its claims for preserving "Liberty and Property"—is reinforced by Esposito's argument in *Bios* that by linking individual sovereignty to the appropriation of external objects, Locke's influential formulation of property "marks a qualitative intensification of the entire immunitary logic" of eighteenth-century sociopolitical practices (63). For more on property, see *Bios*, 63–69; for the immunitary logic of liberty, see 69–77.

17. See Clifford Siskin, "The Year of the System," in 1798: *The Year of the Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Richard Cronin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 9–31; "Mediated Enlightenment: The System of the World," in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 164–72; and most recently *System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016).

18. John Thelwall, *Political Lectures*, no. 1 (1794), 8. For a sampling of the appearance of "system" and "systematic" in *The Peripatetic*, see 79, 108, 127, 167, 195, 209, 302, 303, 323.

19. Esposito, *Immunitas*, 159. For his other comments on systemic openness, see 17, 47, 166–71; his discussion of Niklas Luhmann's work on 45–51 is also particularly relevant in this context.

20. For Esposito's remarks on Haraway, see, for instance, *Immunitas*, 146–48; on Deleuze, *Bios*, 191–94, and *Third Person: Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 17–19, 142–46; on late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century immunological research, *Immunitas*, 141, 153–71.

21. Esposito, *Immunitas*, 166.

22. On *The Peripatetic's* multigeneric form, including its similarity to Menippean satire, see Judith Thompson, introduction to *The Peripatetic*, 37–41.

23. See Judith Thompson, "John Thelwall and the Politics of Genre 1793/1993," *Wordsworth Circle* 25, no. 1 (1994): 21–25.

24. Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and Beautiful*, in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 272, 273–74. As Mary Fairclough amply demonstrates in "John Thelwall and the Politics of the Picturesque," *Romantic Circles / Praxis Series: John Thelwall: Critical Reassessments*, ed. Yasmin Solomonescu (2011), <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/thelwall/HTML/praxis.2011.fairclough.html> (accessed December 16, 2013), Thelwall also takes aim at William Gilpin's previously published work on the picturesque, including *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (1786) and *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape* (1792). My argument here, however, takes issue with Fairclough's claim that in *The Peripatetic*, "The picturesque does not yet have a positive political function in Thelwall's work" (para. 10).

25. For general remarks on multiplicity, see Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michael Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), 61, 129, 298; on the multiplicity of individuals or subjects, 11–12, 21, 42; on the multiplicity of space, 17; on the multiplicity of sociopolitical governance, 88, 93, 119, 125–26.

26. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 143.

27. On this point, see Foucault, *Security*, esp. 120, 148, 238.

28. For a sampling of the range of references to sovereignty related to nonhuman agents in *The Peripatetic*, see various kinds of "reign" (147, 154, 193, 206, 208, 223, 240, 308, 331, 381); metaphorical kings or queens (120, 168, 265, 296); figural "thrones" (89, 92, 93, 120, 124, 304, 381); and versions of the "tyrant" (79, 89, 95).

29. The charge of atheism was often laid at Thelwall's door, often because of his vitalist convictions, although scholars take a range of positions, which range from his atheism being only alleged to his being a "devout" or "stalwart" atheist (Judith Thompson, "Citizen Juan Thelwall: In the Footsteps of a Free-Range Radical," *Studies in Romanticism* 48, no. 1 [2009]: 95n62; and "'Thy Power to Declare': Thelwall, Coleridge, and the Politics of Collaboration," 167) to his actual posture being deist (Jon Mee, "'The Press of the Crowd': Godwin, Thelwall, and the Counter-Public Sphere," in *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, ed. Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011], 92–93). See Roe, *John Keats*, 177–80, for an account of the historical context of the issue. My thanks also to Judith Thompson for her helpful comments, as well as giving me access to her unpublished essay, "'And Bid the Mental Drama Rise Renew'd': Coleridge, Thelwall and 'Visions of Philosophy.'"

**Writing Generation: Revolutionary Bodies
and the Poetics of Political Economy**

Annika Mann

Impatience characterizes the speaker of Anna Barbauld's poem "To a Little Invisible Being, Expected Soon to Become Visible" (published in 1825, though perhaps composed as early as 1799).¹ This speaker directly addresses the impending arrival in the opening stanza:

Germ of new life, whose powers expanding slow
For many a moon their full perfection wait,—
Haste, precious pledge of happy love, to go
Auspicious borne through life's mysterious gate.²

The following eight stanzas of the poem elaborate this movement, which contrasts languor on one side of the dash with speed and action on the other. Barbauld's poem proceeds by fits and starts, alternating between dilation and direct address, between descriptions of the fetus and imperatives that charge that fetus to hurry along. The speaker emphasizes the particular temporality

of the poem—a time of waiting, of suspension—in the activities of the women who prepare for the baby’s arrival. “For thee the nurse prepares her lulling songs,/The eager matrons count the lingering day” (13–14), and the mother desires to see the one “Fed with her life through many a tedious moon” (24). These references to the time of waiting, a measured yet prolonged time—“the lingering day,” the “tedious moon”—also contrast with the repetitive imperatives of the speaker, who commands the fetus to “Haste” three times during the poem.

As Andrea Henderson points out, the speaker of Barbauld’s poem addresses the fetus in descriptions that reference both preformationist and epigenetic theories of embryonic growth. A popular mechanist understanding of generation throughout the eighteenth century, preformationism posited that the fetus grows in size over the period of gestation but not in complexity, already possessing limbs and organs invisible to the human eye. Epigenetic theory, which gained popularity toward the end of the eighteenth century, argued instead that the fetus gains complexity as it grows, developing limbs, organs, and mental powers during gestation. Henderson argues that the speaker’s address to the fetus, as a “Germ of new life” (1), “curious frame” (5), “infant bud of being” and “little captive” (12), constitute evidence that Barbauld’s poem “appears to dramatize the transitional moment between preformationist and epigenetic accounts of embryonic growth,”³ because, while the fetus is described as an invisible “Germ,” it also appears to possess “powers” of its own. This power is evident when the speaker uses revolutionary language to describe the mother’s body as a “living tomb” (20), one with “prison doors” (28) through which the fetus must “burst” (29).

But Barbauld’s repeated emphasis on the time of waiting, and on invisibility itself, implies the inability of either scientific representations or poetic modes of address to generate the actual appearance of the fetus. Visibility is continually raised and then denied: The fetus is described as having “Senses from objects locked” (6), without the ability to “see” (9), and remains “Invisible,” despite the mother’s desire “To see” her child, who is encouraged by the speaker to “Bask in the fondness of a Mother’s eye!” (26). Further, the power of poetry to bring forth that fetus—to generate the baby—is raised but then denied by the poem’s conclusion:

If charmed verse or muttered prayers had power,
 With favouring spells to speed thee on thy way,
 Anxious I'd bid my beads each passing hour,
 Till thy wished smile thy mother's pangs o'erpay. (33–36)

The speaker here rewrites her invocations to the fetus as conditional, even futile: Although as it progresses the poem has been increasingly dominated by exclamation points and verbs in the imperative—"Haste," "Come, reap" (25), "burst" (29), "Launch" (30)—the ability of the speaker to effect those actions is suddenly rejected by the final stanza, spoken instead in the conditional tense. The final stanza deflates the power of poetry altogether, when the speaker admits that addressing the fetus has had, and will have, no effect upon its appearance.

Barbauld's "Invisible Being" ultimately reveals the relative weakness of poetic and scientific modes of representation as truly generative forces in the world. What power the poem does have is that of revaluation: The poem effectively pits poetic speech and the mother's pregnant body against one another. That is, Barbauld's poem illustrates how poetry does work in the realm of visibility, providing images that humorously deflate the status of the fetus as a prisoner of its mother's body: "Haste, little captive, burst thy prison doors" (29) registers comically next to the women who await its arrival—the nurse who "prepares her lulling songs," the mother who "only asks to lay her burden down,/That in her glad arms that burden may resume" (17–18). Poetry may not generate bodies themselves, but it can expose the contradictions among those discourses within which those bodies are represented. The bodying forth that Barbauld achieves in this poem is that of representation itself.

In so doing, Barbauld's short poem, like William Blake's *The First Book of Urizen* (first composed in 1794), reveals a fissure in critical arguments that specify the subject of Romantic poetry as the development of the self, arguments that often rely on distinctions among the emergent disciplines of political economy, biology, and literature. That is, literary critics in recent years have argued that poets at the turn of the nineteenth century use models of development and organization drawn from biology in order to combat narratives of exponential growth in the discourse of political economy

after Malthus. But both “To a Little Invisible Being” and *Urizen* disrupt these frameworks by indicating poetry’s participation in other kinds of temporalities and its production of other kinds of bodies. Both works point to an earlier historical moment when biological and political theories of generation—theories about reproduction and social collectivity—are explicitly collapsed. In reflecting on that collapse, Barbauld and Blake expose the unavoidably shared ground of disciplines at the moment they were increasingly articulating their own separateness.

Regeneration

In the last few decades, literary critics have argued that poets during the Romantic period used models of generation drawn from biology, models that emphasize the development of the unique self, in order to combat depictions of pathological generation in the discourse of political economy. For example, Catherine Gallagher explains that after the publication of Thomas Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)—in which he argues that “the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state” and therefore that population “increases in a geometrical ratio”⁴—the healthy body suddenly “entails a present and a future social condition,” because the “blooming body” is suddenly always “about to divide into two feebler bodies that are always on the verge of becoming four starving bodies.”⁵ According to Frances Ferguson, Maureen McLane, Clifford Siskin, and others, literary writers during the first decades of the nineteenth century countered the discourse of population, particularly its vision of a necessarily antiprogressive, devolving world, by, as McLane puts it, taking aim at those “proliferating bodies [that] provided the metaphorical and logical ground for the discourse of population.”⁶ And they did so by detailing the unique development of a single individual—usually the poet himself or herself. According to much literary criticism, this unique self is often depicted in vitalist terms.⁷ Ultimately, the discourse of population is taken to be not only the motivating force for much of Romantic poetry, but also for the creation of the discipline of literature itself. Literature, consequently, will take up that “narrow but deep subject,”⁸ the human, defined not in terms

of a “utilitarian, scientific, and economic calculus,”⁹ but instead by the growth of a single individuated mind.

According to these intertwined arguments, then, Romantic poets are understood to make literature by way of several simultaneous and complete turns: from proliferation to organization, from political economy to biology, and from the mechanical (or mathematical) to the vital. More recently, however, literary critics have begun to trouble these critical narratives by revealing the wide variety of competing notions of epigenesis proffered at the end of the eighteenth century, many of which contest the version of epigenesis enshrined in organic form: self-generating development. In particular, Amanda Jo Goldstein has recovered a version of epigenesis in the work of Blake, Erasmus Darwin, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck that emphasizes not the fetus’s autonomous self-development but its plasticity, its dependence for that development on its physical and social surround.¹⁰ For Goldstein, Blake’s *Urizen* argues in favor of such historicist epigenesis by satirizing the model of epigenesis as organic form, depicted in *Urizen*’s horrifying (and petrifying) attempts to generate himself as wholly separate from his surrounding worlds.

This chapter participates in the attempt to rethink the intersections of political economy, poetry, and biology at the end of the eighteenth century. Taking my cue from “To a Little Invisible Being,” however, I argue that Barbauld and Blake decenter these long-standing critical narratives in a different way: by illuminating the shared terrain of political economy and poetry, both informed by beliefs about the power of print to generate new collective bodies. Indeed, in their depictions of pregnancy both Barbauld and Blake make visible an earlier concern about generation as proliferation, out of which Malthus’s work grows. In this earlier moment, the proliferation of certain kinds of bodies was thought to be generated by the circulation of texts. In the 1790s, in the wake of revolutions in America and France, British and colonial writers exhibited intense anxiety about the power of revolutionary documents to generate wholly new mass bodies by activating shared or fellow feelings. The debate over writing’s generative power reached its fever pitch in the dueling publications of Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine—*Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and *Rights of Man, Parts 1 & 2* (1791, 1792)—publications that are filled with just the

sort of disordered bodily and funereal imagery that would become a stock feature of the discourse of population. For example, Burke argues that England's current monarchical government is "a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain forever," a "partnership" among different, distinct generations, "those who are living," those "dead," and "those who are to be born,"¹¹ but that the *philosophes* in France "deal in regeneration": "At any price I should [refuse] in my grand climacteric, to squall in their new accents, or to stammer, in my second cradle, the elemental sounds of their barbarous metaphysics" (183). Burke's image of "regeneration" upends distinctions between different generations here, as the second generation, rather than following after the death of the first, is reconstituted within an already existing body. The resulting clamor rings out again in the mob that storms the queen's bedchamber, with its "horrid yells, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell" (60–61). In response, Paine simply charges that Burke's "partnership" rends and upends, as it is an attempt at "governing beyond the grave," acting as a "usurper over [the] living, and . . . over [the] unborn."¹² Paine exclaims instead that monarchy "appears under all the various characters of childhood, decrepitude, dotage, a thing at nurse, in leading-strings, or in crutches," effectively "revers[ing] the wholesome order of nature" (*Part* 2, 191).

These images of diseased regeneration and unnatural reversal illustrate how conservative and radical writers just after the Revolution accused one another of destroying what should be the natural limits on growth and development over time. Ultimately, Burke assigns the power of what he describes as monstrous regeneration specifically to feelings called up by the circulation of written texts: He writes that in Paris there is a "spirit of atheistical fanaticism, that is inspired by a multitude of writings, dispersed with incredible assiduity and expense" (129). Because of the propensity of circulated documents to inspire new, shared feelings that generate new bodies, Burke argues stridently with Paine about keeping the British constitution unwritten, so that it can operate as a powerfully stabilizing condition, within which each generation is equal and distinct. He calls the constitution an "engagement and pact of society" (18), which is invisible and everywhere. "If you are desirous of knowing the spirit of our constitution," he writes, "pray look for both in our histories, in our records, in our acts of parliament, and

journals of parliament" (27). Burke's constitution is thus visible only in a plurality of second-order representations that name historical persons and events, in "bearings and ensigns armorial," in a "gallery of portraits," "monumental inscriptions," and in "records, evidences and titles" (30). Burke's description of the constitution is unacceptable to Paine, who argues that a "constitution is not a thing in name only, but in fact. It has not an ideal, but a real existence; and wherever it cannot be produced in a *visible form*, there is none" (98, emphasis mine). Paine insists on the singularity and particular visibility of the constitution; it must be in a "visible form," that is, a text, or it is nothing. Thus, for Paine, "no such thing as a constitution exists in England" (208). Burke's fears that the constitution embodied in a visible form (in writing) will call up the bodies of its readers in a newly defined collective body—a "homogeneous mass" (Burke, *Reflections*, 157) held together by the feelings it generates—are just what motivates Paine to call for the constitution to be written, printed, and circulated.

Ultimately, *Rights of Man* seemed to confirm all of Burke's fears about the generative power of the "visible form." As E. P. Thompson famously describes, "The success of the Second Part of *Rights of Man* was, in a true sense, phenomenal. The estimate . . . that sales totaled 200,000 by that year has been widely confirmed, this in a population of ten millions."¹³ Thompson writes that "Paine's book was found in Cornish tin-mines, in Mendip villages, in the Scottish Highlands, and, a little later, in most parts of Ireland."¹⁴ This was the regeneration that Burke feared and had attempted to forestall by keeping the constitution unwritten. Paine's own text appeared to prove that print publication, writing as a "visible form," was capable of generating the population of England as a wholly new collective body that felt differently.

In Barbauld's "To a Little Invisible Being" and William Blake's *The First Book of Urizen*, we can see both writers responding to the central terms of this earlier political debate. Although the scale of their concerns differs, both poets consider whether and in what ways the "visible forms" with which the poet works—not only writing and print, but also grammar, figure, and the structure of the book—are complicit in the generation of certain kinds of bodies in the world. In the end, both writers refuse what literary critics and cultural historians alike have taken to be the hallmarks of the Romantic period, and of literature—narratives of development, a focus

on individuality—in favor of other kinds of temporalities and bodies. Ultimately, Blake and Barbauld identify the mother's body, her womb, as measuring the distance between literary and literal generation. If in Barbauld's poem the mother's body holds the literal and the figurative distinct from one another by keeping the fetus "invisible," thereby putting limits on poetry's generational power, Blake's poetry posits a maternal form that endlessly proliferates other bodies, defined by the feeling that calls them up. In Blake's *Urizen*, revolution and biology, poetic and literal generation, are terrifyingly in sync.

Reading *Urizen*

The textual history of William Blake's *The First Book of Urizen* could not be more different from that of Paine's *Rights of Man*. If *Rights of Man* was the "inspiration for the mass-market publishing efforts of the early nineteenth century,"¹⁵ Blake's illuminated book could not really be said to circulate at all. David Erdman records that there is no evidence that "any of the English Jacobins were aware of Blake except as a minor engraver occasionally employed by [the publisher Joseph] Johnson," and no record that even the members of the Johnson circle "ever saw a line of his poetry."¹⁶ Further, the circulation of *Urizen* is particularly complicated because of the state of its known versions. As Jerome McGann writes, "Disorder both within and between the various copies of [*Urizen*] seems almost the rule which Blake followed when he put the work together," as there are seven bound and two unbound versions of the book, and "no two copies [of *Urizen*] ever agree on any one sequence."¹⁷

Blake's *Urizen* shares with *Rights of Man* its pointed critique of conservative understandings of monarchical government as an inheritance passed down from generation to generation. Blake accomplishes this critique in *Urizen* in part by parodying perhaps the most culturally powerful narrative of familial inheritance: the book of Genesis. *Urizen* is the first book of Blake's "Bible in Hell," promised as a product of the infernal printing house in *A Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93). It mimics not only the chapter divisions of Genesis, but also its plot, while shifting key elements in the biblical story, and subjecting others to doublings, simultaneity, and redundancies. Certain events, such as the flood and the making of *Urizen* (which occurs

in chapters 2 and 4), recur throughout the poem. Blake's own repetitions only foreground the confusion that already exists within the original biblical narrative, in that both the creation of Adam and Eve and the story of Noah and the flood are given two different times in Genesis. And although *Urizen* does recount the major plot points of Genesis, it represents those events as occurring out of order or even simultaneously. In *Urizen* there is no moment of stabilizing Paradise before the fall, no prelapsarian time uncircumscribed by the law. When Urizen first appears at the outset of the poem, he is described as already fallen—"a shadow of horror is risen/In Eternity!"¹⁸—and his fallen state is linked to his simultaneous creation of both his own body and the "Laws" (E. 72, Pl. 4, l. 34): "One command, one joy, one desire,/One curse, one weight, one measure/One King, one God, One law" (ll. 38–40). Lawgiver and rebel, God and Satan, are identified with one another in the figure of Urizen, and creation appears simultaneously with the fall.

The cumulative effect of such repetition and reordering within *Urizen* is to rend and arrest any narrative or developmental progress. Moments in Genesis that are beginnings are rendered as aftereffects, as consequences rather than causes. The first and last plates of the poem themselves illustrate this, forming a circle that brings the reader back to where she started. The first (Figure 6.1) shows the figure of Urizen, seated, arms extended in an inverted U. His foot is placed on the right side of the book that the reader is currently reading, the same book into which Urizen writes himself. Urizen's position appears to bend everything in the frame toward itself: His pose is echoed in the shape of the tree behind him and the tombstone-shaped tablets behind his head. Urizen's body appears to climb out of this open book, while each of his hands clasps a writing implement with which he works upon the surface of a book/tomb. The final plate of the bound versions of *Urizen*, Plate 26 (Figure 6.2), mirrors this opening image: Urizen is seated, arms outstretched in this same inverted U posture, his foot in the reverse position of the first plate. In this final plate, Urizen is within the net of his own making (the "Net of Religion"), a net that appears both to be generated from within his body and to enclose him, just as the tablets of the law and the grave appeared to do in the opening plate. These plates thus image enclosure even as they enclose the bound copies of the book itself, forming a circle from which there is no progression, no escape. The final

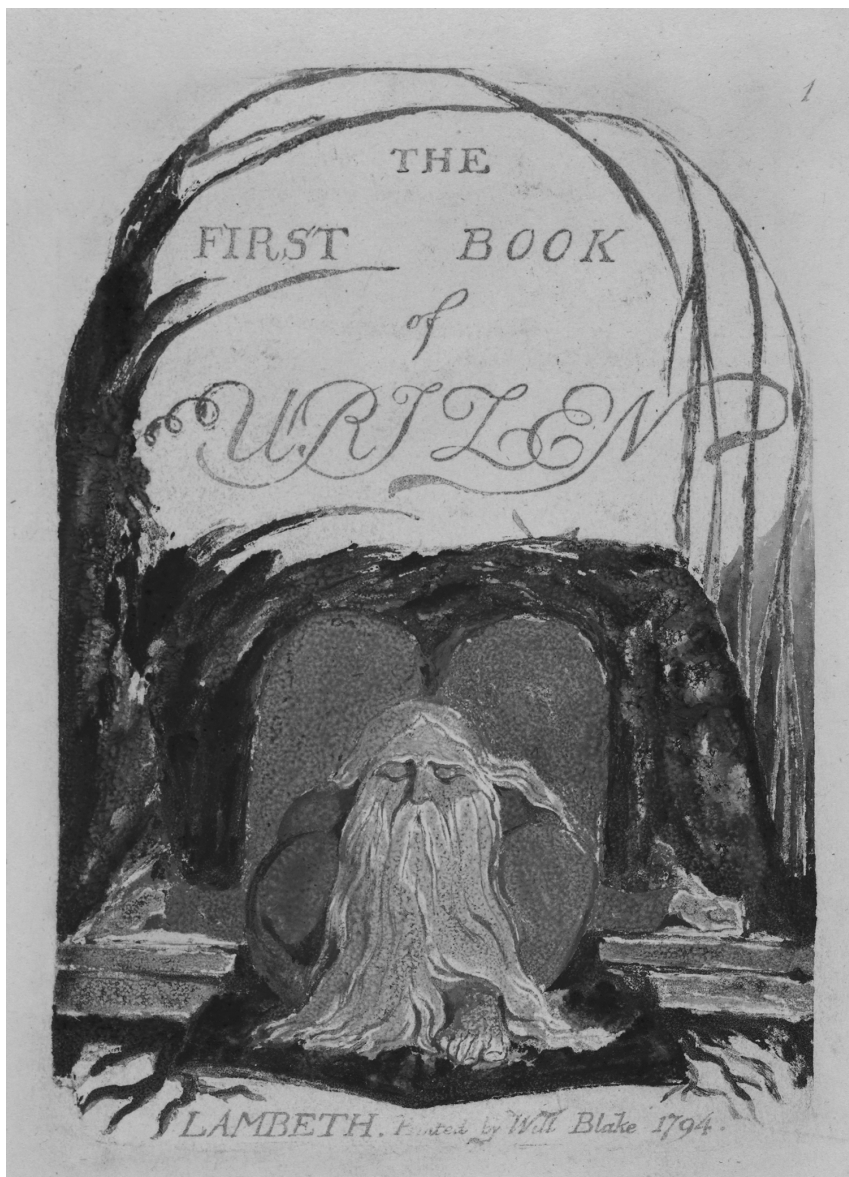


FIGURE 6.1. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 1, title page. A bearded figure (Urizen) sits examining a book. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Urizen, C. 18

They lived a period of years
Then left a noisom body
To the jaws of devouring darkness

5 And their children wept, & built
Tombs in the desolate places.
And form'd laws of prudence, and
called them
The eternal laws of God

6 And the thirty cities remaind
Surrounded by salt floods, now call'd
Africa: its name was then Egypt.

7 The remaining sons of Urizen
Beheld their brethren shrink together
Beneath the Net of Urizen:
Persuasion was in vain.

For the ears of the inhabitants
Were wither'd, & deafend & cold:
And their eyes could not discern,
Their brethren of other cities

8 So Fuzon call'd all together
The remaining children of Urizen:
And they left the pendulous earth:
They call'd it Egypt, & left it.

9 And the salt ocean roll'd englob'd

The End of the
First book of Urizen

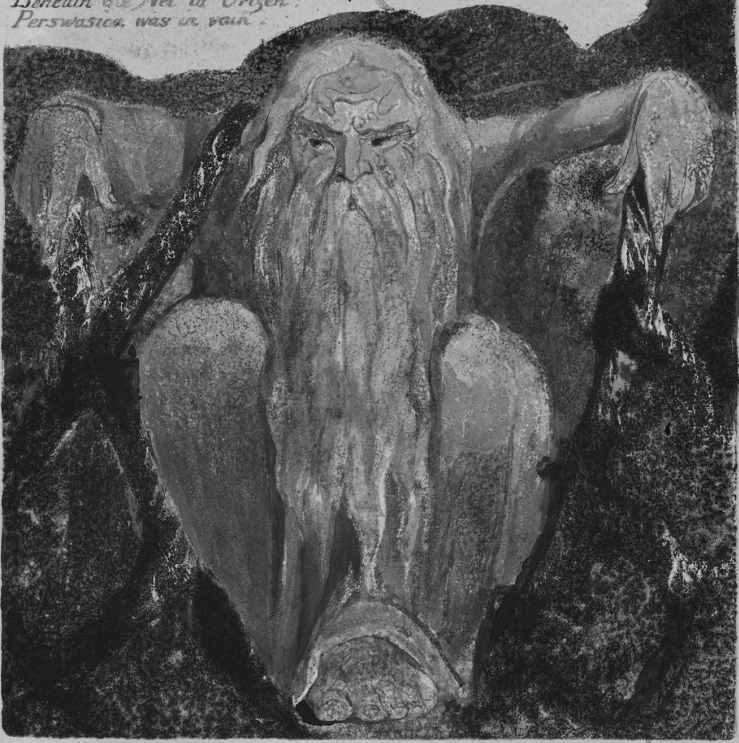


FIGURE 6.2. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 26. A bearded figure (Urizen) sits partially entangled in a net of ropes. © Trustees of the British Museum.

plate in effect encourages readers to begin again where they have finished, to re-enter the grave, net, or book of Urizen.

In *Urizen*, Burke's vision of governmental law as inheritance over time is rendered as an unending imprisonment instead, which Paine affirms in *Rights of Man*: "Age after age has passed away, for no other purpose than to behold their wretchedness" (*Part 2*, 178). Blake's pictorial image for this antidevelopmental, antinarrative force is the circle, loop, or chain that recurs in several of the images of *Urizen*, including Plate 19 (Figure 6.3). Here, in his image of the first family—the poet Los, the first female Enitharmon, and their son, Orc—Blake indicates exactly what kind of "family settlement" Burke's "inheritance" might be. Orc mimics in his body language the chain around his father's neck: The second generation has come into being in a bodily form already in chains and circumscribed by laws.

But the centripetal force of *Urizen* also seems capable of bringing Paine within its corrosive reach. For it is not only the veneration of the familial past, of ancient texts and laws, that is rendered pathological and destructive in *Urizen*, but also the generative force of writing itself—Paine's lauded "visible form." *Urizen* in fact replicates many of Burke's complaints about writing's capacity to "regenerate": Book-making and body-making are inextricable in *Urizen*, and they are alike accompanied by horror, weeping, and disgust. When Urizen separates himself from the "Eternals" in the opening lines of the first chapter, he is described as "a shadow of horror," "Self-closd, all-repelling" (E. 70, Pl. 3, l. 1, l. 3), but he is still somewhat outside visibility: He forms a "void" (l. 4), a "vacuum" (l. 5). Urizen only takes on a visible body when he forms *Urizen*, when he makes (himself into) a book. At the end of this chapter Urizen/*Urizen* speaks: "Here alone I in books formd of metals/Have written the secrets of wisdom" (E. 72, Pl. 4, ll. 24–5). "I" and "have written" are separated by the prepositional phrase "in books formd of metals" (an interruption that is highlighted by the line break), implying that Urizen is in fact already "in books," that his body is actually "formd of metals." Urizen's body is visible to the reader only after he becomes *The First Book of Urizen*:

The voice ended, they saw his pale visage
 Emerge from the darkness; his hand
 On the rock of eternity unclasping
 The Book of brass. (ll. 41–44)

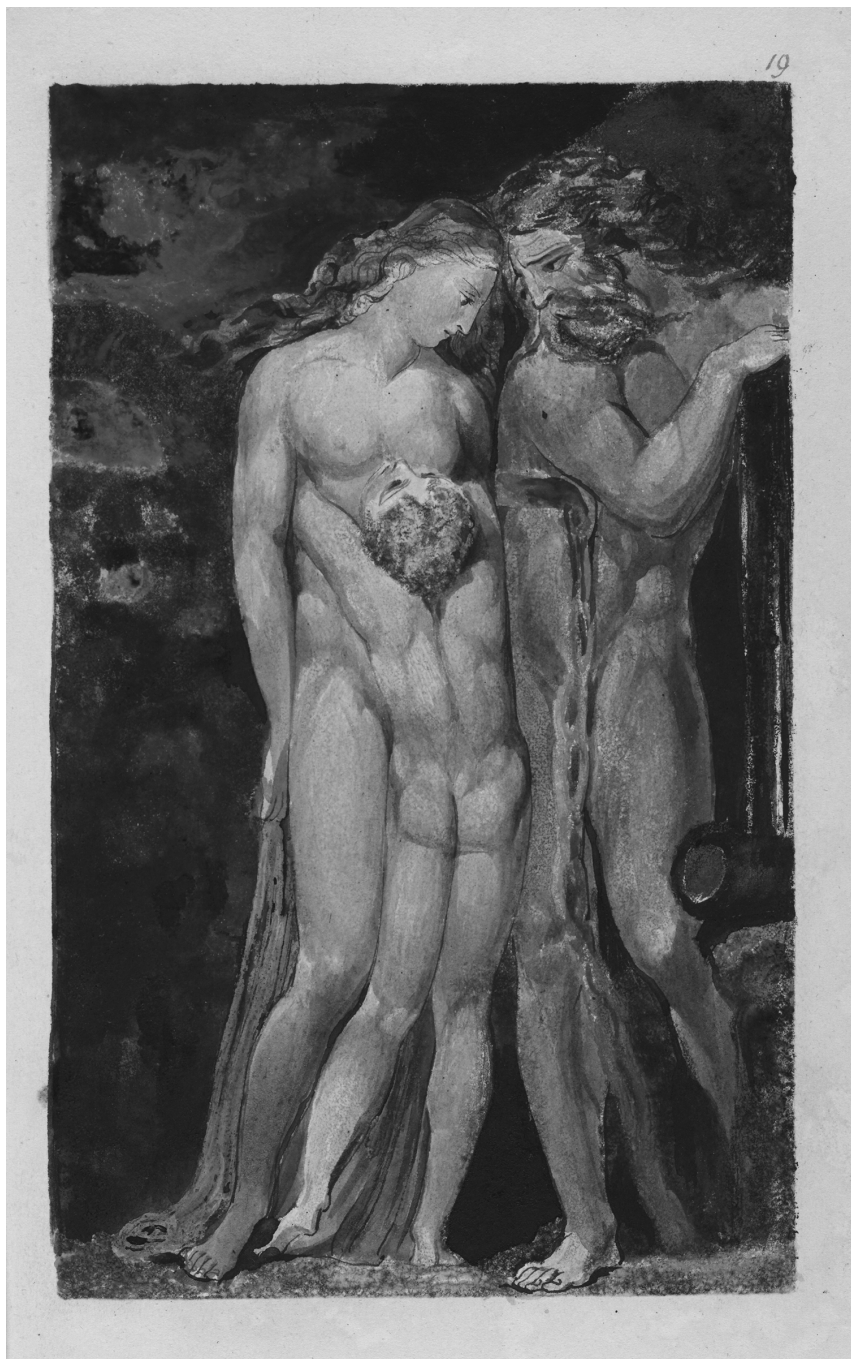


FIGURE 6.3. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 19. Three nude figures, female (Enitharmon) with chain, and two males (Los and their child Orc). © Trustees of the British Museum.

Urizen's book/body is then allied with the chains that appear throughout the poem, made as it is out of "metal" and "brass."

Writing and embodiment are endlessly generative of one another in *Urizen*—to make a book is simultaneously to generate one's own body while to generate a body is to become fixed and confined as an already written book. Self-making and book-making are ultimately revealed as self-imposed confinement. Thus, one can read those mirroring images of Urizen, the first and last plate of *The First Book of Urizen*, as the reflections that Burke and Paine produce of one another, as both of their privileged modes and methods of generation (family inheritance, the visible form of the written book) produce the same *Urizen*/horizon.¹⁹ But the circle of Urizen extends further, to the poetic book-maker himself: To take on a body in *Urizen* is to confine oneself inside a written book, a book that *in its very singularity* is like every other. Blake indicates his own necessary participation in this generative confinement in his depiction of the activities of Los, the poet liberator of much of his illuminated poetry. Chapter 4 describes how Los (re)generates the body of Urizen/*Urizen*: "Los formed nets & gins/And threw the nets round about" (E. 74, Pl. 8, ll. 7–8), and then "watch'd in shuddring fear/The dark changes & bound every change/With rivets of iron and brass" (ll. 9–11). Generation and enchainment, writing and embodiment, are simultaneous in this description, as Los's work with "iron" (E. 75, Pl. 10, l. 6), "chains" (l. 17), and "fetters of ice" (l. 25) culminates in "A vast Spine" (l. 36) and "Ribs, like a bending cavern/And bones of solidness" (ll. 38–39). Los's creative act (tied specifically to Blake's own illuminated printing by the repeated reference to metals) not only confines Urizen in another book/body but also generates Los's own bodily prison. Plate 10 (Figure 6.4) shows the final product of Los's labors, in which the skeletal body of Urizen takes painful shape in flames. Los too writhes, replicating Urizen's position. Los's act of creation has thus simply regenerated himself in Urizen's own image. For in forging a body for Urizen, Los finds himself "sickening" (E. 77, Pl. 13, l. 22), losing his prophetic voice and "eternal life" (l. 33). In *Urizen*, the generative powers of the poet are delimited by his creation of "visible forms" that rebound, generating the poet's own body as another isolating prison.

Finally, *Urizen* renders pathological all generation, physiological and textual, and thus its critique extends ever outward to enclose Blake's own

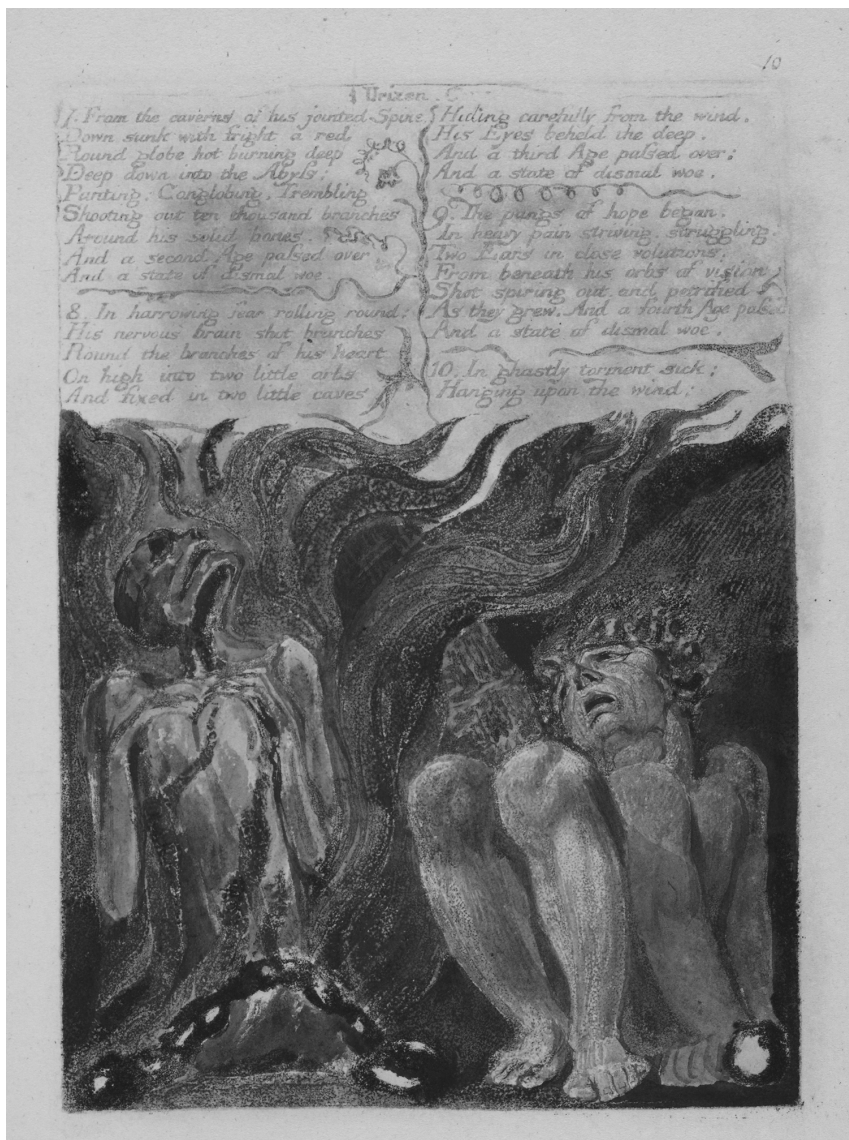


FIGURE 6.4. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 10. Two figures sit, one skeletal, one nude male, surrounded by flames. © Trustees of the British Museum.

poetic project. For if Los is a representation of the poet, then Blake's own method of illuminated printing—particularly that method's creation of necessarily unique versions—is caught up in a cycle of its own “dividing & dividing” (E. 77, Pl. 13, l. 52). Reading *Urizen* in this way (as an ever-expanding critique that encloses Burke, Paine, and Blake himself) aligns with Paul Mann's sense that *Urizen's* reach is necessarily totalizing. For Mann, “The production of *Urizen* is a critique of the production of Urizen.”²⁰ For although *Urizen* is composed of distinct media (pictorial images and writing), those media actually inscribe sameness rather than difference, in that they are *alike* horrifying and incomprehensible. On the one hand, we can understand the images (the solely pictorial plates) of *Urizen* as generated by its language, as embodiments produced by the act of writing—as Urizen's own body seems to grow out of the book in front of him. On the other hand, we can view the text of *Urizen* as emanating from those visual images (a Burkean “gallery of portraits”), as the law instantiated by a reverence for attenuated representations. In effect, this renders Blake's mixed-media production one that is ultimately about the production of sameness, in that the “divided” character of the book only appears to distinguish image/text or form/content. Both image and text remain relentlessly similar in their modes of operation: They divide but then regenerate the same horizons—more *Urizens*.

The plate that most fully captures this aspect of reading *Urizen* is Plate 4 (Figure 6.5). On the top portion, Urizen holds out his book for us to read. On the bottom portion is the written text of *The First Book of Urizen*, which we can read as language. The image of the open book reveals shapes without meaning, but if the text is meant to add content to those shapes, that content expresses only confusion and obscurity, for it describes Urizen's generation of destruction (his war with the Eternals and his creation of the world). This is Blake's ultimate exposure of what the structure of the book as “visible form” generates—what we see but cannot read and what we read but do not understand are incomprehensible versions of each other.

In effect, there appears to be no way to read *Urizen* that is not already generated by and as *Urizen*—every reading (re)enacts the book's processes of confinement. It then appears that it doesn't really matter that each copy of *The First Book of Urizen* is different from every other, because to generate a singular body is to replicate *Urizen*, inscribing that body within an end-

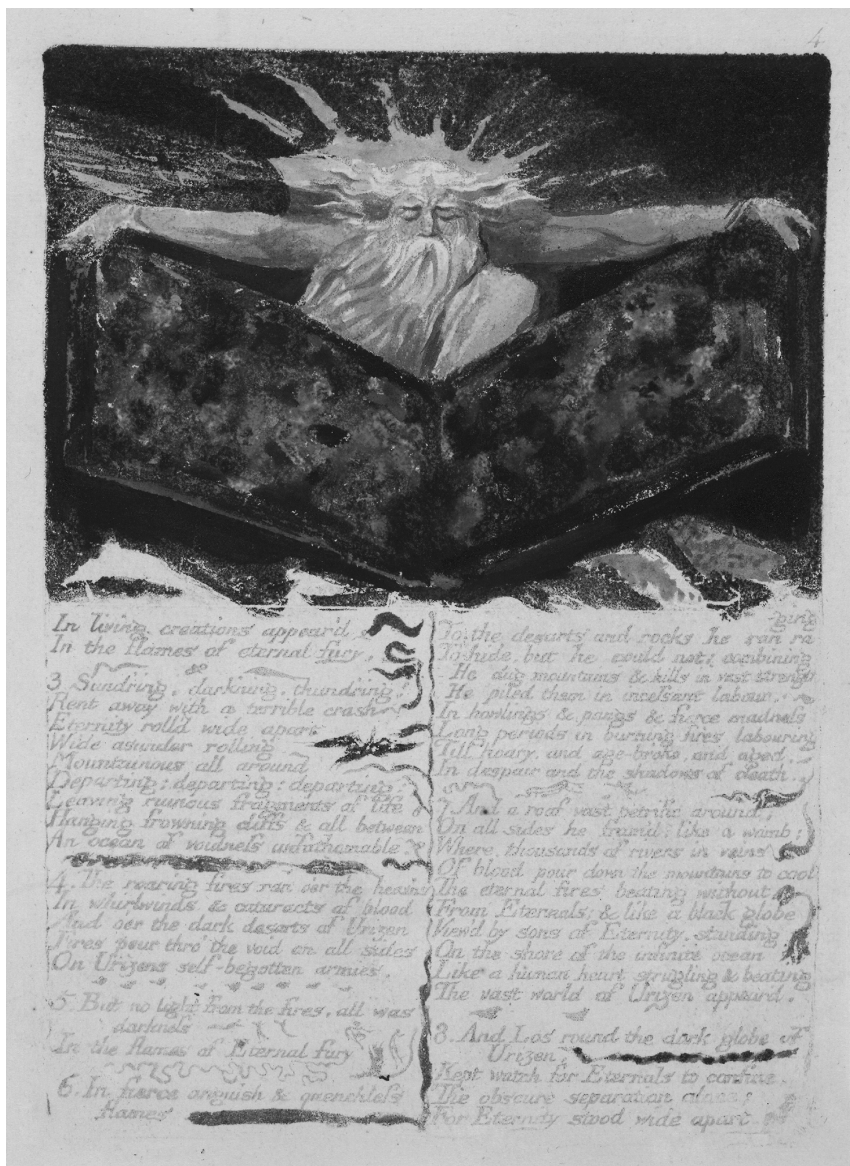


FIGURE 6.5. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 4. A bearded figure (Urizen) holds in his outstretched arms a multicolored book. © Trustees of the British Museum.

less chain. This is a nightmare in which revolutionaries and reactionaries, poets and politicians all take part, each generating the horizon within which readers find themselves. If Anna Barbauld's poem ultimately refuted poetry's generative power over bodies in the world, Blake's *Urizen* makes poetic and physiological generation one and the same. Even if we distinguish the body of the image from the poetry of the text, Blake's *Urizen* illustrates how both media generate and replicate one another within the confines of the book. And for Blake the book enforces replications of itself in and on the bodies of its readers. *Urizen* represents the ultimate extension of the power of the book, its power to generate and regenerate itself upon each reading, and its power over its own readers. *Urizen* is the first and last book, it is all books, the way in which books all form "One command, one joy, one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, one God, one Law" (E. 72, Pl. 4, ll. 38–40).

"And she bore an enormous race"

The preceding section has in some ways closed *The Book of Urizen*—we as readers are forced inside, where we are generated in ways that only replicate what generates us. But I propose reentering *Urizen*, rereading *Urizen* in the terms set out in Anna Barbauld's "To a Little Invisible Being." This essay opened by arguing that Barbauld's poem works as a revaluation. The poem defines the limits of the generative power of poetic speech, for by acknowledging what it cannot generate—the appearance of the fetus—the poem illustrates what it can: the deflation of vitalist or political conceptions of the fetus as a "captive" of its mother's body. By raising and then rejecting revolutionary language, placing images of prisoners bursting their chains alongside nurses singing songs, Barbauld's speaker challenges political and scientific images of pregnancy. She challenges them specifically as *images*: The fetus throughout the poem is resolutely invisible, and the mother's pregnant body works as the poem's vanishing point, the aporia that keeps literal and figurative generation distinct from each other. In contrast, the activities of both *Urizen* and *Los* in Blake's *The First Book of Urizen* illustrate that literal and figurative generation, embodiment and book-making, are essentially the same. Yet much like Barbauld's poem, the mother's womb is *Uri-*

zen's formal center. If in "To a Little Invisible Being" the spatial and temporal dimensions of the mother's pregnant body keep poetic and literal generation distinct, in Blake's *Urizen* the mother's body, the body of Enitharmon, is the ultimate visible form, which upends scale and distinction by activating the proliferation of other bodies. Whereas in the first section of *Urizen* generational powers—self-making and book-making—are associated with the self-conscious activities of Urizen and Los, the second half of *Urizen* assigns to Enitharmon all the generative power of shared feeling.

Both Barbauld and Blake explore generation from within the period of gestation. But while gestation is nominally spatial in Barbauld's poem, its speaker more clearly locates gestation temporally, as a time of waiting. "To a Little Invisible Being" takes place in a largely "invisible" space, but temporality is directly referenced within the poem (the "lingering day," the "tedious moon"), and indirectly indicated by the poem's rhyme scheme. Barbauld's poem progresses through little enclosures, in that her rhyming four-line stanzas (ABAB, CDCD) form natural end-stops on the page. To hear the rhyme scheme one must hear or read the poem in time. Barbauld's poem is a speech that takes place in and through time.

Blake's *Urizen*, in contrast, repeatedly sacrifices sound to image, aural to visuality. Language in *Urizen* repeatedly appears as shapes rather than sounds. Plate 4 (Figure 6.5) is the clearest example of language rendered visually. But the language on the plate is also difficult because it constantly interrupts itself, and the normal grammatical units of the sentence, particularly subjects and predicates, are often greatly distanced from one another. If, in Barbauld's poem, the rhyme scheme and repeated imperatives—"Haste, infant bud of being, haste to blow!"—make reading the lines of poetry easy for the reader, in *Urizen* it is often not clear who is acting and upon what. Whereas "To a Little Invisible Being" possesses a temporality clearly articulated by its grammar and rhyme scheme, *Urizen* makes the act of reading more akin to visualizing images and relations than processing language over time.

And so although *Urizen* does take place in the time of gestation (the poem is subdivided into nine chapters), that temporality is rendered resolutely spatial—or rather, temporality is repeatedly rent or doubled by space. In the first chapter of the poem, when Urizen generates his own body, he pulls himself forever into the space-time of gestation: "Times on times he divided,

& measur'd/Space by space in his ninefold darkness" (E. 70 Pl. 3, ll. 8–9). These divisions of time by space are articulated through images of spontaneous eversion and collapse, when womb space stretches outward and inward, a saturated container filling the world of *Urizen*. Blake's depiction of Urizen forming himself and his world in chapter 2 is just such an image, rendering pregnancy inside out:

And a roof, vast petrific around,
On all sides He fram'd: like a womb;
Where thousands of rivers in veins
Of blood pour down the mountains to cool
The eternal fires beating without
. . . like a black globe . . .
Like a human heart struggling & beating
The vast world of Urizen appear'd.

(E. 73, Pl. 5, ll. 28–33, 36–37)

Urizen makes himself within a womb space that is paradoxically both exploded and contracted: a "vast petrific around," "a black globe" and a "vast world," but also a "womb," "a human heart struggling & beating." In generating himself, Urizen does not exit a womb, but rather hems himself in, "fram[es]" himself inside gestational space. In this passage and others like it, Blake appears to pull womb space up and over the entire poem.

Ultimately, the spontaneously collapsing and everting womb space in *Urizen* is Blake's master-figure for the nightmare of creative generation as replicated containment. But the cumulative effect of the poem's paradoxical womb imagery—imagery that in its impossibility goes far beyond that of preformationism or epigenesis—is to make proportion or scale impossible. For just as language reduced to shapes is not readable, so the paradoxical space of *Urizen* has no room for dimension. The creation of Enitharmon, the first "female form," most clearly illustrates this lack of dimension. Plate 15 (Figure 6.6) depicts her creation out of a "globe of life blood" (E. 78, Pl. 19, l. 1) generated by Los. The human figure (Los) in this image is bent out toward the reader, and his body literally pours out over the bottom of the plate. Everything that should be within Los's body is rendered without. Scale is refused: Los's fibers, his blood, muscles, veins, and hair stretch out of his body and flow downward, creating a globe roughly the same size as his own

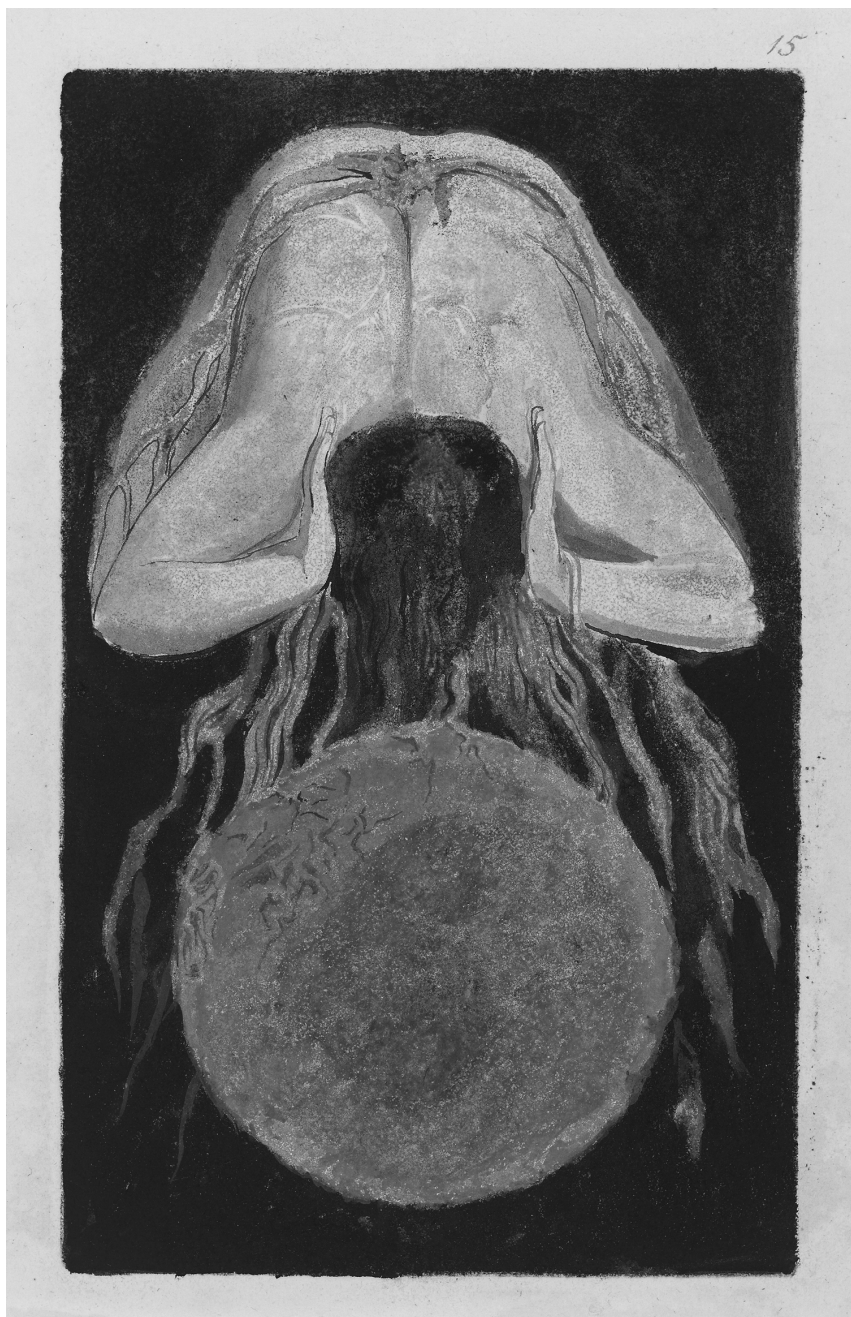


FIGURE 6.6. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 15. Fibers emerging from a male nude (Los), flowing into a large red sphere. © Trustees of the British Museum.

figure, a globe that appears to be growing larger. The globe itself appears to reflect the hair, fibers, and blood out of which it is created. This image lacks any background to ground the figure: The extroverted human form takes up the whole frame. And so while the fibers of Los surround the globe, appearing to enfold it, we can also see the human figure as itself extending out of the globe, as generated by its world. Blake has in this image abandoned the scale of the human body, which now generates the womb from out of its own fibers, a womb that becomes its own enfolding. Thus, although W. J. T. Mitchell argues that “containing all the collapsing, dividing, shrinking worlds of Urizen . . . is the implicit boundary of the human form,”²¹ Plate 15 shows how those boundary lines can become fibers, leaping out of the shapes they are supposed to contain, snaking out of the body to connect with and generate other forms.

Enitharmon presents a further challenge to Mitchell’s reading of the human form as an “implicit boundary” in *Urizen*, for Enitharmon’s visible form activates feeling in the poem, a feeling for another that continually generates more visible forms, more womb/tombs. When Los makes Urizen/*Urizen*, he feels pity: “Pity began, / In anguish dividing & dividing” (E. 77, Pl. 13, ll. 51–52), creating “a round globe of blood, / Trembling upon the Void” (ll. 58–59). This globe becomes Enitharmon, whose image is rendered in Plate 15

The globe of life blood trembled
 Branching out into roots;
 Fib’rous, writhing upon the winds;
 Fibres of blood, milk, and tears; . . .
 At length in tears & cries imbodyed
 A female form trembling and pale
 Waves before his deathly face.

(E. 78, Pl. 18, ll. 1–4, 6–8)

Enitharmon’s “imbodyed” form is specifically created by fellow feeling, and thus grows not “in” the womb, but “out” of feeling. As her form “Waves” before Los’s face it inspires yet more fellow feeling, for when “Los saw the Female & pitied” (E. 78, Pl. 19, l. 10), he proceeded to generate “his likeness / On his own divided image” (ll. 15–16), thereby creating Orc. This scene indicates

that if book-making and self-making are mapped onto one another for the first half of *Urizen* (making all bodies into the same kind of body, the same book), generation in the second half of *Urizen* is activated by fellow feeling, which again proliferates one form.

In Barbauld's poem the mother's visibly pregnant body puts limits on poetic generation by keeping the fetus "invisible" despite the poet's pleas. But in *Urizen* that body becomes a visible form that inspires feeling in another, which begins the proliferation of other bodies—a collective mass or population—enchained by that feeling. Ultimately, in Blake's vision, all generations are enclosed within the same gestational space, for Enitharmon's "trembling womb" (E. 79, Pl. 19, l. 23) contains all the metamorphoses first represented by Orc: first a "Worm" (l. 21), "it grew to a serpent" (l. 26), and then "Many forms of fish, bird & beast, / Brought forth an Infant form / Where was a worm before" (ll. 34–36). Orc, as we have seen, comes into being already hemmed in by the ever-present horizon, within the chain of his own body. At the end of *Urizen*, Enitharmon's womb gives birth to bodies mixed and monstrous, bodies that are born as "forms" still contained within her gestational space: Blake writes that "she bore an enormous race" (E. 81, Pl. 20, l. 45), and these bodies appear caught midmetamorphosis, in the act of being reconfined. Plate 23 (Figure 6,7) shows Urizen's sons and daughters, born of Enitharmon, in "reptile forms shrinking together" (E. 82, Pl. 25, l. 37). The figures crowded at the top of the plate appear partly snakelike, partly batlike, and partly female. The text that accompanies Plate 23 is a description of Urizen's creation of religion, which spreads "swift diseases" (l. 26) and a "dark net of infection" (l. 30) over the whole earth. That this "infection" directly corresponds to the feeling associated with Enitharmon throughout the poem is made clear in Blake's description of the "Net" as specifically female: "Like a spiders web, moist, cold, & dim" (l. 10), the Net is "Female in embrio" (l. 18). Finally, it is the female form that is aligned with Urizen's ultimate, totalizing act—she is the infection of feeling that renders time ineffectual, that determines and contains all bodies as forms defined by their vision of others' feelings.

In the mother's body, both Blake and Barbauld identify what will be the central figure for Malthus's calculation of inevitable social degeneration through the proliferation of increasingly diseased bodies.²² *Urizen* in particular illustrates how that calculus is itself informed by an earlier, explicitly



The Ox in the slaughter house moans
The Dog at the wintry door
And he wept: & he called it Pity
And his tears flowed down on the winds

6 Gild he wanderd on high, over
their cities

In weeping & pain & woe;
And where ever he wanderd in sorrows
Upon the aged heavens

A cold shadow followd behind him,
Like a spiders web, moist cold & dim.
Drawing out from his sorrowing Soul
The dungeon like heaven dividing
Where ever the footsteps of Urizen
Walkd over the cities in sorrow.

7 Till a Web dark & cold throughout all
The tormented element stretchd
From the sorrows of Urizens soul
And the Web is a Female in embryo
None could break the Web, no wings
here

8 So twisted the coms & so fastned
The meshes: twisted like to the
human brain

9 And all calld it The Net of Reli-

Chap: IX

1 Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow
And hardening Bones began
In swift diseases and torments
In throbbings & shootings & grindings
Thro all the coasts, till weakend
The Senses inward rushd, shrinking
Beneath the dark net of infection.

2 Till the shrunken eyes clouded over
Discernd not the woven hypocrisy
But the streaky slime in their heavens
Brought together by narrowing perceptions
Appeard transparent air; for their eyes
Crew small like the eyes of a man
And in reptile forms shrinking together
Of seven feet stature they remand

3 Six days they shrank up from existence
And on the seventh day they rested,
And they blest, the seventh day, in sick
hope
And forgot their eternal life

4 And their thirty cities divided
In form of a human heart
No more could they rise at will
In the infinite void, but bound down
To earth by their narrowing perceptions

FIGURE 6.7. *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D, plate 23. Three incomplete nude female forms surrounded by serpents' coils and bat wings. © Trustees of the British Museum.

political conversation about how writing generates collective bodies by activating shared feeling. Thus, in *Urizen* Blake confronts poetry's generative power, its ability to transform its readers and thereby limit their conceptions of themselves and of the social: They become a mass of like-minded, potentially dangerous bodies. Barbauld avoids the anxiety apparent in Blake's totalizing vision—a vision that exposes the weakness of claims that poetic writing is somehow distinct from political writing in its operations on its readers—by identifying the conjoined body of the mother and fetus as a collective unmoved by poetic address and resistant to figuration. Although visibly pregnant and presently feeling, the mother's body does not correspond to, or become an adequate figure for, the generative power of poetic speech. In this, Barbauld, like Blake, also refuses what will be touted as the "Romantic" conception of poetry as capable of generating deeply human individuals. Further, Barbauld's poem challenges an understanding of shared feeling as anything but a community of women joined in song, or the mother with child ("Part of herself, yet to herself unknown" [22]). And though she does not give up on the power of poetry (to while away the time, to measure and amuse), she leaves that power contingent.

NOTES

1. Editors William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft note that a "newly discovered manuscript text . . . identifies the expectant mother to whom Barbauld addresses these lines as Frances Carr, one of Barbauld's Hampstead neighbors; the invisible being is her first child, born in 1799" (*Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft [Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002], 147).
2. Anna Barbauld, "To a Little Invisible Being Who Is Expected Soon to Become Visible," in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, 147–48, lines 1–4. Further references to the poem are from this edition and will be cited by line number.
3. Andrea Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.
4. Thomas Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: Norton, 1976), 19, 20.
5. Catherine Gallagher, "The Body versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew," *Representations* 14 (Spring 1986): 84, 85.

6. Maureen McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 135. Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). As Ferguson writes, “A Romantic consciousness emerges in reaction to the proliferation of other consciousnesses” (*Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* [New York: Routledge, 1992], 106).

7. For examples of this larger body of work, which has aligned Romantic literature (particularly poetry) with vitalist theories of life, see Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: The Romantic Generation and the Discovery of the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: Harper, 2008); Clayton Koelb, *The Revivifying World: Literature, Philosophy, and the Theory of Life in Europe’s Romantic Age* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2008); and Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

8. Siskin, *Work of Writing*, 33.

9. McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, 20.

10. See Goldstein’s essay in this volume; she elaborates further on this argument in *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logic of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

11. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 29. Hereafter cited by page number in the text.

12. Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man, Parts 1 & 2*, in *Peter Linebaugh Presents Thomas Paine, Rights of Man and Common Sense*, ed. Jessica Kimpell (London: Verso, 2009), *Part 1*, 71, 73. Hereafter cited by page number in the text.

13. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 107–8.

14. *Ibid.*, 108.

15. Nicholas Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 146.

16. David Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire, A Poet’s Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 154.

17. Jerome McGann, “The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake’s Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes,” *Studies in Romanticism* 25, no. 3 (1986): 306, 307.

18. William Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake: Newly Revised Edition*, ed. David Erdman (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1982), page 70, plate 3, lines 1–2. Further references to the poem are from this edition and will be cited by page number, plate number, and line number.

19. In *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Saree Makdisi argues that Blake's overall project was to distance himself from the dominant strand of liberalism represented most stridently by Paine.

20. Paul Mann, "The Book of Urizen and the Horizon of the Book," in *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, ed. Nelson Hilton and Thomas Volger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 56.

21. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 129.

22. See Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population*.

William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny

Amanda Jo Goldstein

At length in tears & cries imbodyed

—WILLIAM BLAKE, *The First Book of Urizen*

Mundane Eggs

When William Blake calls *this* world, the world disclosed by our fallen and shriveled senses, “the Mundane Egg,” he tucks the theater of human history within the most disputed experimental object of early modern embryology. For the longest conceivable eighteenth century, controversies in the study of animal generation—discipline-forging controversies for what would become comparative anatomy, developmental biology, and experimental physiology—concerned events underway within mundane eggs (Figure 7.1). Blake arguably modeled the seven-stage creation enacted in *The First Book of Urizen* not only on Genesis, *Paradise Lost*, and the Gnostic gospels, but also on William Harvey’s then-classic observations of chick embryogenesis in *Exercitationes de generatione animalium* (1651, trans. 1653).¹ Harvey’s work had reignited empirical research into animal generation and turned mundane hens’ eggs—“because *Egges* are a cheap merchandize, and are at hand

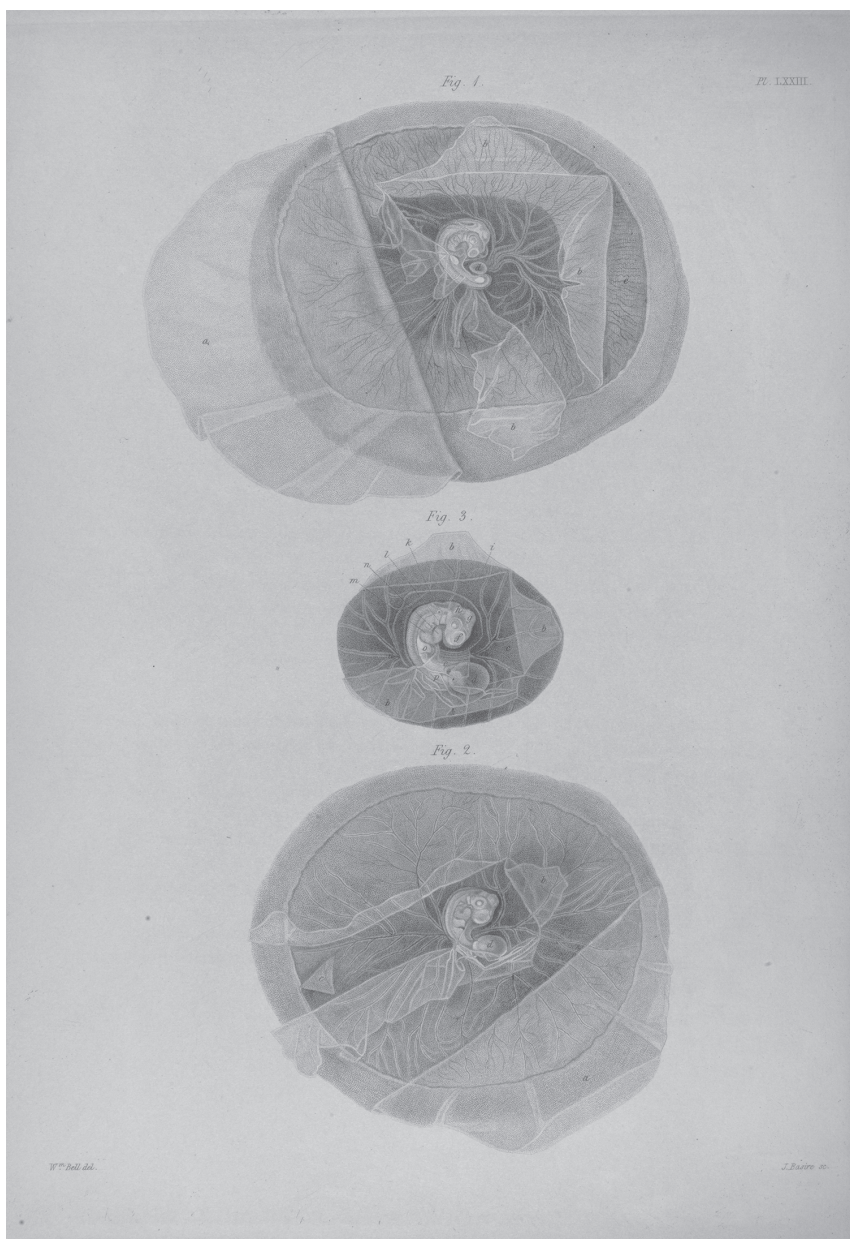


FIGURE 7.1. Engravings of John Hunter's goose embryo preparations, illustrating the "pretty large opaque membrane, which . . . can be divided and subdivided into a number of layers" and incidentally corroborating the Blakean Mundane Egg's "labyrinthine intricacy, twenty-seven folds of opakeness." John Hunter, *DIC* 5, xi, Pl. LXXIII, 232–33; Blake, *Milton* 16.26. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

at all times, and in all places”—into *the* paradigmatic experimental object for life scientific enquiry.²

Subjecting his eggs to the New Scientific rigor of “ocular inspection,” Harvey’s series of replicable exercises suggested that in them “it is an easie matter to observe” the “first evident, and distinct ground-works of *Generation*; what progress nature makes in *formation*, and with what wonderfull providence shee governs the whole worke.”³ But Exercitation 49 confesses that “*The Efficient Cause of the Chicken, is hard to be found out,*” and Harvey unleashed a hundred and fifty years of controversy around his provisional theory of “epigenesis”: the suggestion that the shapeless, homogenous seminal materials visible in a fertilized egg were capable of forming into the intricate body of a nascent chick, and that they did so “by degrees, part after part,” by serial differentiation in the observer’s presence and in his present tense (see Figure 7.1). Skeptics responded that the finished form had obviously existed, imperceptibly, from the start.⁴

Thanks to the groundbreaking research of numerous scholars over the last two decades, it is no longer news that Blake, with the majority of more and less canonical Romantic poets, intimately engaged the emergent, scientific study of life we now know as biology. And yet as literary critics have rediscovered the foundational controversy between “epigenesis” and “preformation” theories of generation, we have too quickly seized upon *epigenesis*—loosely construed as the vital, dynamic, indeterminate refutation of deistic, mechanical predetermination—as suitably Romantic life science. It is not that preformation, which was anyway on the wane in the late eighteenth century, should be rehabilitated instead. Rather, rigorous distinction among rival variants of epigenesist biopoetics is needful: As L. S. Jacyna argued decades ago, early nineteenth-century people understood rival theories of biological reproduction to carry competing systems of moral and political order to term.⁵

In this essay, I argue that Blake’s specific mischief on the Mundane Egg satirizes one powerful model of epigenesis—incidentally, the one most frequently recovered by Romanticists—and invites us to reconstruct another. Rejecting the rhetoric of autonomous “self-organization” from within a broader epigenesist idiom, Blake’s books challenge the tendency to synonymize epigenesis and organicism, as well as to frame the question of Romanticism and biology as a question of the fate and merit of a particular, organicist

ideal: the Kantian ideal of living form as autonomous “cause and effect of itself.”⁶ In Blake, as in the contemporary zoologies of Erasmus Darwin and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, the theory and lexicon of epigenesis cast generation as a work of acute historical and circumstantial dependency, rather than of autotelic power. Here living bodies are those that tend, for better or worse, to make an organ of experience; their morphologies present compounding archives of interactions with their physical and social surround. The epigenesist idiom these writers share thus permits them to depict living forms as exquisitely susceptible to incorporating experience in time and to perpetuating the relations of their moral and material milieu—that is, to depict human and nonhuman animals as the bearers of contemporary circumstances and powers, even at the level of the bodies they take for natural.

Indeed, when it comes to biological timekeeping, Blake’s form of “incarnate history,” as Noel Jackson perfectly puts it, provokes us to challenge that persistent commonplace whereby it is first on the grand scale of species evolution across geological time that biology is said to have granted a history to nature, or whereby the organism’s teleological *Bildung* is a microcosm for phylogenetic and world-historical progress.⁷ Blake’s historicist epigenesis operates instead, like Erasmus Darwin’s and Lamarck’s, on the micrological scale of a being’s mutability over the span of its own life: Its susceptibility and resourcefulness vis-à-vis contemporary environments and practices, and the way the pressures of inheritance, need, repetition, habit, and contingency interact to mold its organs from conception until death. This strain of Romantic epigenesis was requisite not only for the deep historicism of later evolutionary theory, but also, less familiarly, for the coming sciences of sociology and historical materialism.⁸ And, as I hope to show, it is in concert with this neglected biological tradition that Blake depicts livable form as the outcome of social conformation: the biological body as a fabric of many hands and the site where, as Saree Makdisi has argued, physical nerves and fibers act as “psychobiological” conduits knitting supra-individual forces into individual selves.⁹ Here Blake departs from a powerful, Romantic organicist conception of life, but also, as I will close suggesting, anticipates the fresh theoretical import of “epigenesis” for biology now, in the aftermath of “The Century of the Gene.”¹⁰

But while Blake clearly engaged “Generation” as the experimental science we would now call “developmental biology,” it is important to recognize the

term's broader significance in his usage. In Blakean cosmogony, "Generation" is synecdoche for postlapsarian history, the ongoing fall into sexual reproduction and corollary systems of subjective embodiment, moral and natural law. In the "Looms of Generation" within the Mundane Egg, "Men take their Sexual texture Woven."¹¹ "Generation" thus weaves the span of worldly history for Blake, a "Woof of Six Thousand Years" unfinished until Jesus's second coming.¹² There is thus a strong sense in which any Generation science would amount to the study of the processes by which fallen being perpetuates itself.¹³ But this means also that any physiological "History of the Hen's Egge" has clear import as a theory of *this*-worldly historical process. In what follows, I take seriously both Blake's minute engagement with reproductive science and his delimitation of any such science to the "Finite & Temporal" set of perspectives confined to "The Mundane Egg."¹⁴ Scenes of generation in Blake pertain precisely and modestly to works of inadvertent repetition and minor transformation within a fallen world, opening a technically mundane dimension in the work of an artist best known for radical, prophetic aspiration.¹⁵ Thus, after examining the rival theories of epigenesis at work in *The First Book of Urizen*, I turn to a quiet passage in *Milton* that explores how generated beings might discover their bodies' negotiable lineaments, were they but to recognize the histories casually "im-bodied" there.¹⁶ Such a concern, I close suggesting, returns in the present day "epigenetic" revision of molecular genetics.

The Missing Baumeister

Recognizing this epigenesist countercurrent means reorienting our theoretical reconstruction of epigenesis from the question of organization's *causes*—that panoply of vital principles and formative powers for which early life scientific discourse is well known—toward a more basic and general feature of epigenesist approaches to living form. This intervention was *temporal*. Epigenesis concerned *when* matter attained to form, generation's tense; it amounted to what Jacques Roger has called "the re-introduction of duration . . . into the science of life."¹⁷ From Harvey to Blake, the basic provocation of any theory of epigenesis was to represent living forms as *forming* in the present progressive, in mundane natural-

historical time, against opponents who represented form as fixed since Creation.

The prefix “epi” that Harvey conjoined to his theory of generation denotes “upon, at, or close upon (a point of space or time)” (*OED*), and in describing his intervention, Harvey incessantly stressed the term’s *temporal* dimension. An embryo’s “parts are not fashioned all together at the same time, but emerge successively;” “some parts are born after other parts,” “this thing coming after that.”¹⁸ Marking out fetal development in a numbered series of “Inspections,” his book serialized the embryo into a succession of forms, a “daily progress” underway in a present shared by observer and observed. In so doing, Harvey’s experiments and others like them turned the interval of individual embryonic development now known as “ontogeny” into the standard preoccupation of early life science. And it was out of this fundamentally temporal provocation that epigenesis sparked its better-known host of controversial causal conjectures regarding the powers and principles responsible for embryonic formation: Needham’s *vis plastica*, Maupertuis’s particulate attraction, Buffon’s *moule intérieur*, Wolff’s *Bildungskraft*, Blumenbach’s *Bildungstrieb*, and so on.

Such theories of epigenesis elicited a powerful counterreaction from natural philosophers skeptical not only of the groping attempts to name the shaping agency at work in living matter, but also of the threat such immanent agencies posed to the traditionally divine prerogative of conferring form. Naturalists such as Swammerdam, Spallanzani, and Bonnet responded with rigorous theories of “preexistence” (now “preformation”) consonant with prevailing deistic understandings of a cosmos set into lawful motion by a presently aloof Prime Mover.¹⁹ They answered the epigenesists’ progressive present tense with a rival, past perfect temporality: The finished bodies of each member of each generation of each species had been formed by God at Creation. The most memorable theories stowed these finished forms for timed release, like dolls nested in progressively smaller miniature, within each species’ first parents’ seed: “ev’ry Foetus bears a secret Hoard/With sleeping, unexpanded issue stor’d,” attested Richard Blackmore, for instance, in the didactic epic *The Creation* (1712). Whereas Harvey professed to chronicle the real-time emergence of the “whole edifice” of a chick from a single point, Blackmore cast that “vital Speck” as an already existing “entire, but rumpled Animal”: It need only “unravel and untwist/Th’invelop’d

Limbs, that previous there exist.”²⁰ Preexistence theory was often called “evolution,” and Blackmore’s verse draws out the term’s etymological sense of “unrolling”: “Evolution” then meant the way an insensibly minute and transparent being would gradually “unravel” over the threshold into *visibility*, rather than existence.

In this context, when Blake engraved the frontispiece to a biography of the polymathic Swiss experimental physiologist Albrecht von Haller in the early 1780s, he was representing one of the most influential protagonists in the eighteenth-century epigenesis controversy (Figure 7.2). Haller’s research on the “sensibility” and “irritability” of animal nerves and fibers had ignited prodigious interest in the distinctive properties of living matter, furnishing a physiological dimension to the cult of sensibility and providing fresh evidence of epigenesis.²¹ In the words of the biography Blake illustrated, Thomas Henry’s *Memoirs of Albert de Haller, M.D.* (1783), Haller “traced the formation of the chicken from the instant in which the first change in the egg is perceived, and the vital speck begins to dilate, to that when the little animal quits the shell in which it has been formed.”²² Attesting that Haller “saw the organs successively spring up before his eyes, acquire life and motion; saw them transformed and perfected,” the text effectively glosses and endorses epigenesis, including the theory’s characteristic stress on the contemporaneity of this process and its observation.

But over the course of his career, Haller (1708–77) in fact embodied the generation controversy, ultimately repudiating his epigenesist stance on the conviction that mere physical and chemical laws could not explain “by what means the rude and shapeless mass of the first embryo is fashioned into the beautiful shape of the human body”; a body “so exquisitely fitted for its proper and distinct functions,” that “no cause can be assigned for it below the infinite wisdom of the Creator himself.”²³ In a challenge to Buffon at the height of the midcentury debate, Haller argued that the theory of epigenesis lacked a “Building Master” (*Es fehlet ein Baumeister*), a supervisory intelligence to “construct the scattered microscopical parts of the body according to the wonderful plan of the human body, who would prevent an eye from ever sticking to a knee, or an ear to a forehead.”²⁴ But let’s pose the question of generation’s “missing Building Master” to Blake.

“*We* form the Mundane Egg,” he responds decisively in *Milton*: “And every Generated Body in its inward form/Is a garden of delight & a building of

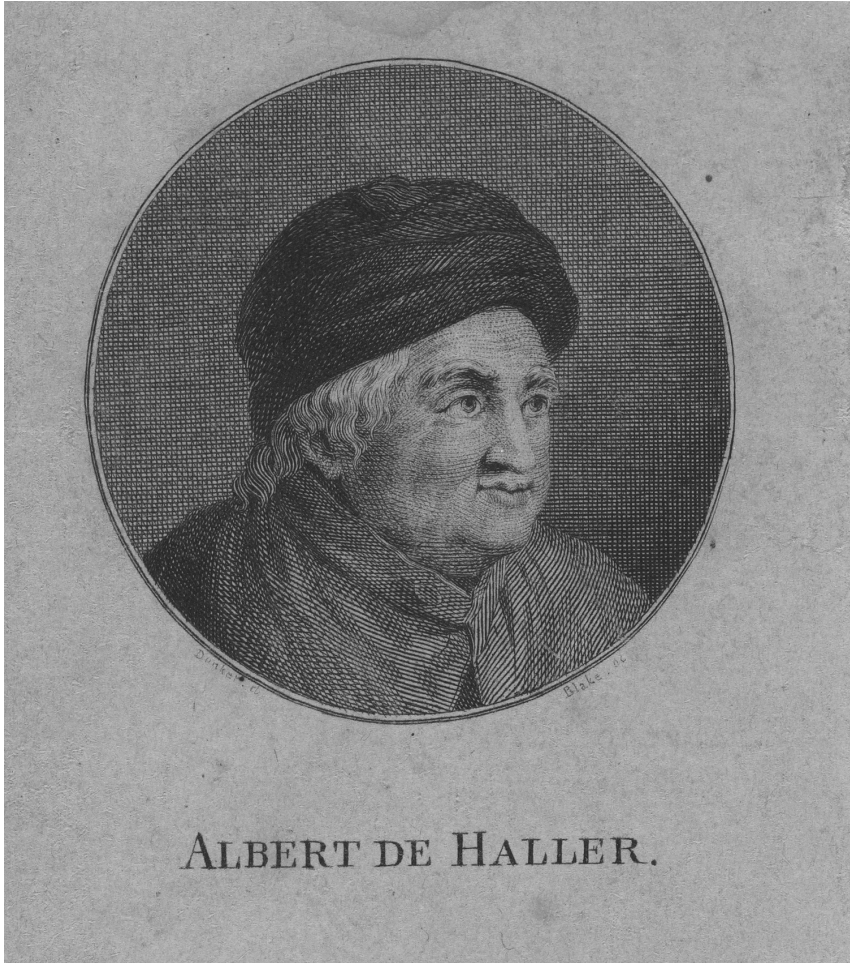


FIGURE 7.2. Blake's frontispiece for Thomas Henry's *Memoirs of Albert de Haller*, M.D. (1783). Courtesy of Widener Library, Harvard University.

magnificence / Built by the Sons of Los.”²⁵ Indeed, in *Milton* (c. 1804–11) and *Jerusalem* (1804–c. 1820), “Los,” Blake’s avatar of poetry and prophecy, “continual[ly] builds the Mundane Shell.”²⁶ He, his estranged partner Enitharmon, and their myriad sons and daughters are pictured tirelessly hammering, beating, blowing, weaving, spinning, knotting, binding, fabricating, molding, carving, and ornamenting tissues and organs within the

Egg into shape. In *Milton*, “Thousands & thousands labour” to craft its embryonic organs as industrial productions: “The Bellows are the Animal Lungs: the Hammers the Animal Heart/The Furnaces the Stomach for digestion.”²⁷

That is, Blake’s illuminated books turn the controversy-embroiled mundane egg into an ongoing social construction site, as though despite the numerous competing accounts of the “forces,” “drives,” and “powers” controlling generation, what is really “missing” is an account of the force of labor, social, and sexual relations in the formation of new bodies and their sensoria:

Let Cambel and her Sisters sit within the Mundane Shell:
Forming the fluctuating Globe according to their will.
According as they weave the little embryon nerves & veins
The Eye, the little Nostrils, & the delicate Tongue & Ears
Of labyrinthine intricacy: so shall they fold the World.²⁸

It is a hallmark of Blakean scenes of generation to depict the embryonic rudiments of sensation—epigenestic insofar as they are “forming” and “fluctuating” in the present progressive—taking shape from industrial materials and under social pressure. Scenes of generation such as this magnify the mundane egg into an already inhabited world, suggesting that the shape of a new being’s body *in ovo* is neither preformed by God nor the product of its own self-making. Rather, it is “Forming” under the hands of numerous social actors who precede it in “the World” that its “delicate” senses are folded to fit and verify.

Here resemblance between generations and the exquisite fit between form and function are assured not because the embryo is preexistent, but because its circumstances are. The point bears repeating for its reversal of our present-day identification of biology with determinism: Here, the body natural—the “fluctuating,” plastic, nervous, and sensitive body furnished by epigenesist life science—is more tractable in its organization than the social surround, which has extraordinarily effective means of perpetuating itself across generations.²⁹ (The above scene summons the gendered division of labor, the force of parental instruction, and the system of industrial textile production.) The scene’s presiding pun identifies weavers’ labor with the labor of childbirth, swapping “looms” for “wombs” to drive home the point

that a host of historical circumstances enforce the biological certainty that “like produces like.”

In Blakean epigenesis animal life archives and perpetuates material relations—amniotic, sexual, industrial—as organs. Against the humanist expectation that biology would naturalize social effects by passing them off as necessary, Blake’s usage reveals the aptitude of the epigenesist idiom for theorizing processes of *naturalization*: for registering the physical embodiment of historical contingencies and their stubborn persistence across generations. One would be hard-pressed to find a body better suited to demonstrate Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of body *hexis* than that of Blake’s “little embryo”: Its development chronicles nothing so much as “the em-bodying of the structures of the world,” or better, “the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world.”³⁰ Saree Makdisi has decisively argued the “seamless continuity among the social, legal, economic, and political organizations and the organisms inhabiting the world defined by them” in Blake’s books. Yet his analysis nonetheless tends to reduce the bivalency of such determination to a unilateral imposition of “law” upon “life’s endlessly proliferating creative energies.” In Blake’s books and related zoologies, however, beings *live* by complicit coproduction of the discursive and symbolic constraints that give them viable form; unlike in new vitalist criticism, the biological life of the body cannot be summoned as a source of pure “ontopoetic power” to resist disciplinary organization.³¹

From “Epi-” to “Auto-” Genesis

The synthesis of early life scientific theory best known to Romanticists derives, appropriately, from Kant’s third *Critique*. In the second half, on teleological judgment, Kant argues that natural philosophy was lately delineating a specific type of being for its object: the “organized and self-organizing being,” distinguished by a “self-propagating formative power” incomparable to “any causality we know.”³² Unlike material beings—defined, in Kant’s view, by contingent obedience to “blind mechanism”—the organism seems “related to itself reciprocally as both cause and effect”: The finished whole appears to function as the governing telos behind the parts’ formation, yet also first to come into existence as their consequence.³³ Such an autonomous

“causal nexus,” Kant argues, merits investigation under the rubric of its special, autotelic insularity. And organisms thereby serve to authorize teleological thinking in the epistemology of science, a form of regulative judgment not otherwise justifiable.³⁴

Arguing for the singularity of organic causation helped establish the disciplinary legitimacy of an autonomous science of “life” at the turn of the century, and Kant’s ginger, heuristic notion of autotelic organic form was amplified in Göttingen school research, idealist *Naturphilosophie*, and the natural and aesthetic philosophy of Coleridge and his disciples. But the proposition that organisms are constituted by their own “self-organizing” power must be understood as one among many answers to the challenge raised by epigenesist biology. Many historians of science represent strong-form organicism that way, pointing out, as did Goethe at the time, that Kant in effect converted the *problem* motivating early biology (whence organization?) into its *premise* (organisms are self-organizing).³⁵ In this clever organicist reformulation, “auto,” the prefix of self, consequentially displaces “epi,” the prefix of sequence.

Among Romanticists, however, the Kantian notion of form “without recourse to extraneous causes” has retained pride of place.³⁶ Helmut Müller-Sievers brilliantly criticizes epigenesis, defined as “self-generation,” as the very condition of possibility for Romanticism and its ideological resilience: “Only organically can the interminable chain of causes and effects be bent back onto its own origin, and only as organic can a discourse claim to contain all the reasons for its own existence.”³⁷ And Denise Gigante recently expounds the aspiration toward organic form (natural, national, and textual) as the hallmark of “Romanticism as a shared intellectual project”: It seeks the “pluripotent, even totipotent” power to generate fresh wholes “from the ground up in the manner of epigenetic particulars,” rather than by “tinkering with” the “existing structures and organizations that constitute society.”³⁸

But neither assessment of epigenesis as “self-generation” accounts for the Blakean scenes of generation we have been tracking, in which the language of epigenesitic embodiment permits the poet to describe a being intricately enmeshed in, rather than triumphantly free from, “existing structures and organizations.” Blake’s texts insist that in releasing the embryo from the divine predetermination defended by preformist theory, epigenesist discourse did not only or always deliver it cleanly into autonomous self-determination.

Here, epigenesis turns the forming body over to the multiple pressures and powers operating in a given historical present to manipulate an exquisitely susceptible embryo: "Helpless it lay like a Worm/In the trembling womb/To be moulded into existence."³⁹ Such a being depends for its basic biological viability on a process of social conformation; its very "existence" is contingent on such "moulding."

Blake blithely derides the logic of autonomous self-organization this way: "Incessant the falling Mind labour'd/Organizing itself."⁴⁰ And the heroic, idealist myth of self-generation has a name in his books: "It is Urizen." Such, at least, is the horrified assessment of the observers of "Self-closed, all-repelling" generation in *The [First] Book of Urizen*.⁴¹ Pinpointing self-reflexivity as the linchpin of the powerful organicist conception of life, Blake parodies that idiom with a string of reflexives: "Self-closed," "self-contemplating," "self balanc'd," "self-begotten," "In anguish dividing & dividing."⁴² The book establishes Urizen as an uncompromising paternal God—"no flesh nor spirit could keep/His iron laws one moment"—and aligns his oppressive monomania with the uniquely "Self-closed" causal circuit of organicist generation. "I alone, even I!" proclaims Urizen, vaunting his autonomy much as Coleridge would in a letter soon afterward: "Life is I myself I!"⁴³ But such singular integrity redounds to totalitarian effect: "One command, one joy, one desire,/One curse, one weight, one measure/One King. one God. one Law."⁴⁴

Working "ceaseless round & round," Urizen produces a "dark globe" that is at once our "pendulous earth" and an epigenetic "globe of life blood trembling."⁴⁵ Blake's equation of "striving, struggling," "beating," "surgeing," "Heaving" vitality *with* Urizen's moral and physical laws of "iron" is another pointed intervention.⁴⁶ It neatly undermines the shared strategy of vitalist discourses from Bichat to Bergson: recourse to "unfathomable life," as Donna Jones puts it, that sets "raw, unverbilized, lived experience" against the "the petrification of social forms" and "sedimented categories and schema."⁴⁷ Although Blake scholars frequently repeat the vitalist salvo, Blake's books tend instead to picture organs that simultaneously self-generate *and* petrify: Urizen's ears, for instance, "Shot spiring out and petrified/As they grew"; and, in perfect parody of organic autonomy, Urizen builds his own "petrific" womb.⁴⁸ One falls into social constraint and the vital, self-organizing body at the same time; against the persistent view that vitalism is mechanism's

opposite, Blake captures a suspicious isomorphism—a “Conglobing”—between quivering “Globule[s]” of organic “life blood” and the solid particles of a mechanical universe.⁴⁹ From this perspective, mechanism and organicist vitalism are reducible to the same individualist logic, whether of the (etymologically individual) atom or the “self-begotten” life.

Despite his triumphal crowing, Urizen’s *Book* makes clear that he did not, in fact, begin alone. Much of Urizen’s story is told from the perspective of surrounding “myriads of Eternity,” who critically lament his oddly self-inflicted torment. Lest Urizenic *self*-organization be mistaken for life, generation, or organization in general, their voices declare Urizen “unprolific!” “Unorganiz’d,” and “Disorganiz’d.”⁵⁰ His flesh “rent” from their social and somatic fabric, Urizen’s “Sund’ring” sets a pattern in the book for tissues whose injured loose ends (nerves, fibers, spines) “writh[e] in torment/Upon the winds.”⁵¹ The “tearing” that Urizen is philosophically unsuited to acknowledge revisits his world in “tears”: An unfelt wound weeps from his back, forming a net that entraps the denizens of the world he engenders.⁵²

To generate this form of heroic-Romantic autonomy—“Urizen so nam’d/That solitary one in Immensity”—much else had to be expelled.⁵³ Thus, Blake represents Urizen’s cosmic “vacuum” as a previously inhabited space; his Newtonian distinction between solid and void is less a physical fact than the effect of forcible expulsion that the poem laments in sad, simple, present progressive:

Departing; departing: departing:
 Leaving ruinous fragments of life
 Hanging frowning cliffs & all between
 An ocean of voidness unfathomable . . .⁵⁴

Here Urizenic life, the life of autonomous self-organization, is achieved at the expense of lives that take another form. The lines register this predicament in a strange prosopopeia that allegorizes Blake’s work of animation over and against the Urizenic kind: the middle lines’ enjambment renders the cliffs’ frown an effect of inadmissible forms of life caught “hanging” at the margins of Urizen’s world(view). Here, Blakean figuration animates “fragments” that are outcast rather than unreal: “Portions of life; similitudes/Of a foot, or a hand, or a head” are less imaginative projections than injured forms rendered scarcely perceptible, livable, or tolerable (“Fright-

ning; faithless; fawning”) under given epistemic circumstances.⁵⁵ These circumstances enforce a literally monomaniacal love of “one” that stretches from atomist physics to organicist physiology, from subject formation to authoritarian rule (“One King. one God. one Law”).

And yet *The Book of Urizen* leaves the success of this project vividly uncertain. Even in the above lines, the marginalization of other “life” is incomplete, productive not quite of void, but of “voidness.” In one of the book’s most stirring illuminations, Urizen—usually curled, bound, or muscling raw elements around—floats passively, arms open, through a plate awash in blue (Figure 7.3). Here an “ocean of voidness” seems to buoy and caress Urizen’s body, lifting and parting his trademark beard and blurring the edges of his “self-clos’d” shape. W. J. T. Mitchell correlates the image to the next plate, where, despite the anguished din of physiological “changes,” we learn that Urizen also floats in a kind, sustaining sea:

2. All the myriads of Eternity
All the wisdom & joy of life
Roll like a sea around him
Except what his little orbs
Of sight by degrees unfold.⁵⁶

In this perspective on Urizen’s self-generation, the myriads “of life” return—were they ever absent?—as his vastly underestimated medium or surround: the fluid milieux sidelined from the strong organicist version of epigenesis. And flashing forward to this essay’s final turn to contemporary epigenetic theory, when Blake draws attention to the myriads implicated in Urizen’s purported *self*-generation, he chimes with an eminent philosopher of developmental biology in her present-day attempt “to speak for the background—the mute, manipulated materials, the featureless surround”:

Sometimes, the peripheral is the political. Ultimately it may seem less appropriate to speak of entities’ replicating themselves (thus marginalizing and instrumentalizing everything else) than to say that they may be assembled or constructed again and again as a result of processes in which they play a part but do not “control.”⁵⁷

But there were epigenesists who spoke for the material and social surround in Blake’s time too.

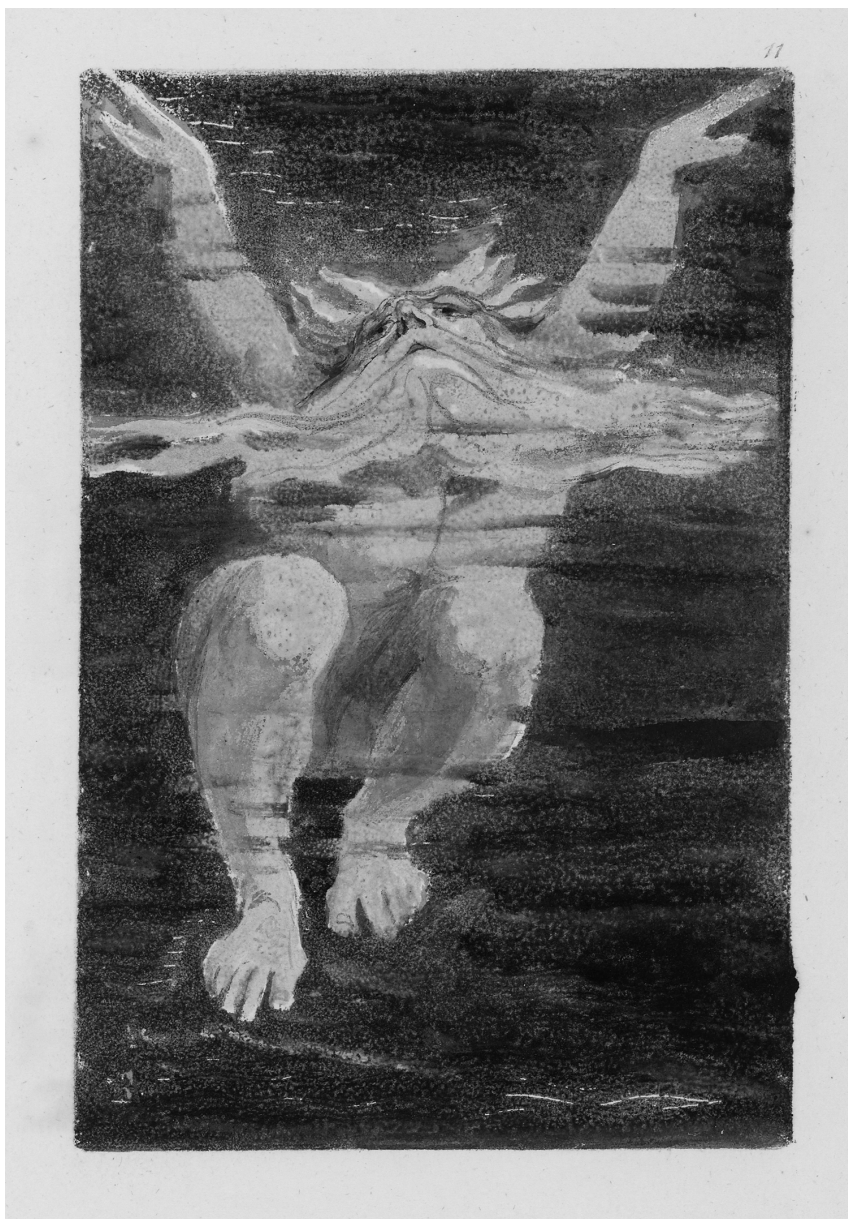


FIGURE 7.3. *The First Book of Urizen*, plate 7. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Epigenesis and Milieux

Many sorrows and dismal throes
 Many forms of fish, bird & beast
 Brought forth an Infant form
 Where was a worm before.⁵⁸

In explaining epigenesis in *Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life* (1794), the polymathic naturalist (and sometime Blake-employer) Erasmus Darwin argued that embryonic life begins with a “simple living filament,” endowed not with self-organizing power but, like Blake’s malleable worms, with an exquisite, passive-voiced receptivity to influence. Darwin compares the embryonic filament to the kind of fibril that “compose[s] the mouth of an absorbent vessel,” supposing it to be “endued with the capability of being excited into action by certain kinds of stimulus.”⁵⁹ The surrounding fluids bend and stimulate this receptive “rudiment,” already likened to a mouth, into “a living ring” suited to “embrace or absorb a nutritive particle of the fluid in which it swims.” Each such absorption, Darwin explains, reshapes the embryo’s body, and each different shape entails different capacities for response: With every “new form,” he insists, come “new powers, new sensations, and new desires,” themselves fresh goads to further diversifying interactions between animal and surround.⁶⁰ At stake is a theory of recursive conformation for which every interaction leaves new morphological developments in its wake. In Darwin’s theory of epigenesis, living forms are those that cannot but make organs of experience, their bodies archiving successive interactions with material milieux. The technical term that arises in *Zoonomia* for this conformative relation is “configuration,” rigorously and capaciously meant. Configuration denotes lifelong epigenetic processes of *shaping-with* that compound to form not only complex morphological structures but also the complex capacities for sensibility, ideation, association, language, and sympathy that Darwin sees as their direct corollaries.⁶¹

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck offered another influential contemporary theory of nonorganicist epigenesis. Tasked by the French Revolutionary Convention with inaugurating the study of zoology at the new Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle, Lamarck pointedly refuted the ontological distinction and narrative agon between organism and inorganic surround posited in organicist

philosophy.⁶² With the recent vitalist claims of Xavier Bichat in mind, Lamarck asserted: “It is not true, as has been said, that all that surrounds living bodies strives to destroy them, such that if these bodies did not possess in themselves a *principle of reaction*, they would quickly succumb to the effects of the action that the inorganic bodies that environ them exert upon them.”⁶³ In many animals, he continued, life “does not exist except by an external influence,” and “this influence, far from tending to destroy them, is on the contrary the sole cause of their conservation.”⁶⁴ In fact, according to Lamarck, it is through the action of its “environing milieu [*milieu environnans*]” that a body obtains “the first sketches of the order of things and the internal movement that constitutes life.”⁶⁵ Even more than for Erasmus Darwin, then, what enables “a little mass of materials” to attain life and organization in Lamarck’s text is a susceptibility rather than a power: an “aptitude to receive,” from surrounding circumstances, the “impression *that traces . . . the first lines of organization*.”⁶⁶ To be disposed toward life, a body must be of “maximum suppleness”—just consistent enough to detain the fluid milieu that course through its permeable mass, sculpting and diversifying its shape, and rendering it capable, at each turn, of new and different absorptions. “With time and all the right circumstances,” Lamarck concludes, these processes “complicate and perfect” the simple mass into a viable animal delicately suited to its circumstances.⁶⁷

In the work of both naturalists, grasping the literally constitutive, stimulating, and sculpting pressure of material “circumstances” in the production of animal lives—construing animal organs and capacities as responsive records of this impress—opens onto a critical understanding of the (corpo-) real influence of social and cultural circumstances over the course of biological life. However gratifying it might have been for the humanist camp, then, we cannot credit Blake’s grasp of epigenesis as social process “imbodied” to his brilliant, poetic subversion of naively positivist biology. Lamarck, who coined the very word *biologie* in the text we have been examining, gave that science the express task of investigating the *co-operation* of “the *physical* and the *moral*,” the natural and the cultural, as “two orders of things which have one common source [and] react upon one another, above all when they seem most separated.”⁶⁸ Biology was to explore how an animal’s “habits, its way of life, and the circumstances in which those individuals, from whom he derives, found themselves” have literally “constituted the form of

its body . . . and the faculties it enjoys.”⁶⁹ The now notoriously mutable animal body posited in Lamarckian transformism lives by way of its susceptibility to circumstance, its capacity to make an organ out of repeated experience, and to archive this history as a physical organization that it transmits to its (equally plastic) offspring.

Lamarck ends the *Recherches* indicting the inequitable distribution of “favourable circumstances” that consigned the “multitude” of modern citizens to “conserve and propagate a multitude of prejudices that subjugate them,” much as Darwin felt himself perfectly on topic in extolling abolition and the American and French Revolutions in his own natural historical texts.⁷⁰ This tradition of unapologetically political and philosophical life science—unapologetic, perhaps, because it saw politics and philosophy as biologically consequential—was an eventual casualty not only of anti-Jacobin reaction, but also of biology’s disciplinary modernization in the purportedly modest, apolitical, antiphilosophical, and anti-literary style advocated by Lamarck’s colleague Georges Cuvier.⁷¹ But this was not before “radical morphology” took hold among a broad cadre of London medical men, fueling the popular vitality controversy that Romanticists know as the background to *Frankenstein*, and provoking concerted theological and political counterattacks long before Erasmus’s grandson published *On the Origin of Species*.⁷²

Lamarck’s capacity to stress, at once and without contradiction, the determining power of both environments and animal “actions and habits,” makes his approach to living form more interesting than a mere reversal of the organicist line. One might have expected sheer external determination to replace the organism’s self-generating autonomy. But, in fact, by the lights of twentieth-century evolutionary biology, Lamarckian life science has appeared ridiculously *voluntaristic* instead: above all for the contention that organisms can effect heritable changes in their own morphology, like those notorious Lamarckian giraffes that purportedly lengthened their necks in the struggle to reach acacia leaves.⁷³ In fact, the strain of epigenesis I have been tracking does not easily corroborate organic autonomy or heteronomy, agency or passivity, because its express task and ongoing critical virtue are to theorize life and its science as transpiring between these alternatives, in the domain of *need*, *habit*, *use*, *disuse*, *circumstance*, and *milieu*—terms expressly summoned to articulate viable form as a fundamentally social *and* natural open-ended phenomenon. In Blake, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck, this

lexicon integrates the stubborn corporeality of social and historical patterning *and* the ongoing capacity of lives so formed to transform—in improvisations that leap the gap between the pasts congealed in their body parts and the exigency of present circumstance.

In his poignant essay “The Living and Its Milieu,” Georges Canguilhem argues that the oft-forgotten specificity and value of the notion of *milieu*, which Lamarck first imported for biology from physics, was its “fundamentally relative” character.⁷⁴ In French, *milieu* translated the “aether” that supplemented the Newtonian mechanics of central forces: the subtle fluid invoked to transmit gravity’s action-at-a-distance between bodies separated in space. For Canguilhem, this background illuminates a “relative” dimension elided in later usage:

The fluid is the intermediary between two bodies, it is their *milieu*; and to the extent that it penetrates these bodies, they are situated within it [in the middle of it, *au milieu*]. . . . To the extent that we consider separately the body on which the action, transmitted through the medium, is exercised, we may forget that the milieu is *a between two centers*.⁷⁵

It helps to recall that biological milieux could be conceived in this way, communicating relations of force among multiple “centers,” of which the developing body in question is one. For it is clear that our colloquial sense of “environment” as an organism’s passive outside is inadequate to the *milieux environnants* at work in Lamarck’s, Blake’s, and Darwin’s biologies, which confer not only substance but *form* to the growing body.⁷⁶ Lamarck even sees “the internal movement that constitutes life” as an eddy in their circumambient motion.⁷⁷ With “subtle fluids” that work across an individual animal life-span and skin, these thinkers invoke transcorporeal communications through which disparate scales and orders of force interact to shape living forms.

For Canguilhem, though, this reconstituted notion of milieu opens onto something that links biology, counterintuitively, to subjectivity. Whereas in physics the milieu contributes to a “general theory of the real”—an aspiration to universal and impartial truth—Canguilhem notices that biological appropriations inflected the term into a kind of circle: Associated words such as *circumstances* and *environner* express “a certain intuition of a centered formation.”⁷⁸ In biology, that is, the concept of milieu instantiates a view

from and toward a living center for whom *this* set of factors, among the “anonymity of elements and universal movements,” constitutes *its* milieu.⁷⁹ The point recalls the Blakean twist on the ancient correspondence between micro- and macrocosm that we read above, in which the World was less the body’s analogue than its ineluctably partial *worldview*: the “eye, the little Nostrils, & the delicate Tongue & Ears” were said to “fold the World” just as they themselves had been folded. Biology, Canguilhem argues, is dignified rather than diminished by this partiality of perspective and by the inability to exempt the knower from the problem. Suspecting that science “is rooted in life,” biology “perpetuates a permanent and necessary relationship with perception,” with the problem of looking out as a subject of need and a center of force.⁸⁰

Emphasizing the generation of organs of perception and the transformative presence of a perceiver in his scenes of generation, Blake, like Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin, thus draws on a particular risk and resource of biological thinking: Constitutionally partial, this science sometimes becomes a study of the contingent dependency both of living forms and of the project of knowing them.⁸¹ And in this way, the epigenesist science of the milieux furnishes the idiom, rather than the target, of Blake’s vehement critiques of another logic of life, the organicism that unwittingly substantiates pervasive individualism in natural philosophy and political theology alike.

Beholding

If we take Urizen as organicist physiology’s paradigmatic experimental object—the self-organizing life-form—then this object finds its scientific subject in Blake’s early parody of the comparative anatomist John Hunter, who makes a cameo as “Jack Tearguts” in *An Island in the Moon* (1784). “Tearguts” evinces a truly Urizenic insensibility to organ-tearing (and tears):

He understands anatomy better than any of the Ancients hell plunge his knife up to the hilt in a single drive and thrust his fist in and all in the space of a Quarter of an hour. he does not mind their crying—tho they cry ever so hell Swear at them & keep them down with his fist & tell them that hell scrape their bones if they dont lay still & be quiet—⁸²

Tearguts and Urizen typify two poles of a damaging contemporary dynamic between the subjects and objects of life-scientific experiment: the mutually constitutive relation between the “self-clos’d” living form and the experimentalist violence that seeks to break or cut it open. This relation drives Blake’s most famous anatomical scene, in which Jerusalem tries to explain the futility of violently exposing a body’s interior:

Why wilt thou number every little fibre of my Soul
 Spreading them out before the Sun like stalks of flax to dry?
 The Infant Joy is beautiful, but its anatomy
 Horrible ghast & deadly! nought shalt thou find in it
 But dark despair & everlasting brooding melancholy!¹⁸³

The “everlasting brooding melancholy” that issues from such anatomy is attributable to both the anatomist and to the being he dissects in the passage; it belongs to both in the science of living form as originally closed and violently disclosed. Thus the anatomist discovers in his object (“*in it*”) the same set of adjectives that had characterized Urizen: “Horrible,” “deadly,” “dark,” and “brooding.” Urizen curls his body into a globe; Jack Tearguts curls his hand into a fist.

But there is a minor life scientist in *Milton* whose body hexis, whose way of holding his hands, solicits something fortuitous in the relation of mutual “configuration” between scientific subject and living object. Antamon, whose name seems to recall and reform anatomy and its atomism, is not an apocalyptic figure, nor does he manage to redemptively reintegrate Urizenic bodies and anatomized Infants back into the prelapsarian social fabric. Rather, like many of the beings laboring busily in *Milton*, Antamon performs a compromised and compromising work of minor rehabilitation. Blake, whose works have noisy apocalyptic pretenses (“Six Thousand Years/Are finishd. I return! both Time & Space obey my will”), is not typically thought to give much time to mundane and palliative labor.⁸⁴ And yet, in *Milton*, Los and his progeny are out less to shatter the Mundane egg than to repair, maintain, and refurbish its organs and structures. In language that recalls the “ruinous fragments of life” exiled from Urizenic genesis, they set to work giving “a name and a habitation” to amorphous and fragile entities “With neither lineament nor form but like to watry clouds.”⁸⁵ These marginally

real beings would pass for “nothing” without the shaping attention that establishes “form & beauty around the dark regions of sorrow”; otherwise they stand “on the threshold of Death/Eternal.”⁸⁶

What follows is a form of experimental contact and contouring that allows these beings to collaborate in their own bio-poetic animation and figuration, their attainment of livable, perceptible form. Privileging the bilateral sense of touch over “ocular inspection,” Antamon’s “sweet Science” mobilizes the “holding” in “beholding” against the violent pursuit of life in the organic depths of a body’s interior and the melancholy inability to recognize knowers as shaped by the object they seek to know.⁸⁷ Notice how he coaxes “melancholy,” the affective hallmark of anatomy in the Teargutsian style, into a form of sweetness:

Others [of the Sons of Los]; Cabinets richly fabricate of gold & ivory;
For Doubts & fears unform’d & wretched & melancholy
The little weeping Spectre stands on the threshold of Death
Eternal; and sometimes two Spectres like lamps quivering
And often malignant they combat (heart-breaking sorrowful & piteous)
Antamon takes them into his beautiful flexible hands,
As the Sower takes the seed, or as the Artist his clay
Or fine wax, to mould artful a model for golden ornaments.
The soft hands of Antamon draw the indelible line:
Form immortal with golden pen; such as the Spectre admiring
Puts on the sweet form; then smiles Antamon bright thro his windows
The Daughters of beauty look up from their Loom & prepare.
The integument soft for its clothing with joy & delight.⁸⁸

Antamon, of the “beautiful flexible hands,” appears only three times in Blake’s work, notably in *Europe* where his mother Enitharmon calls out to him: “I see thee crystal form, / Floting [*sic*] upon the bosomd air; / With linements of gratified desire.”⁸⁹ S. Foster Damon’s *Blake Dictionary* defines Antamon as “the male seed,” and it is indeed wonderful how many models of generation Antamon’s brief appearances collate: the materialist position that looked to inorganic crystallization as an analogue for life; Harvey’s famous image of the forming body as its own clay *and* potter; the preformist topos of an embryo unfurling from a tightly compressed seed; Buffon’s

mind-bending notion of “internal molds” for each of the new being’s parts; and, in the Spectre’s sudden duplication, the scandal of asexual reproduction without differentiation.⁹⁰

What Antamon takes in hand with the Spectre is, among other things, a string of proffered metaphors for generation, which he brings into touch with Blake’s characteristic insistence on the sociality of sexual embodiment. But the scene is rare in Blake’s oeuvre for representing this interaction as reciprocity and pleasure. Unlike Cambel and her sisters, whom we saw “Forming the fluctuating Globe according to their will,” here the fluctuating Spectre consentingly dons the “sweet form.” And there are numerous ways in which Antamon receives as much “sweet form” as he bestows; to begin with, it is first in conjunction with this Spectre that Antamon assumes organized body at all—in *Europe*, he was a cloud, among the formless and endangered class that *Milton* worries over.

Antamon has been called “a sexualized expression of the Imagination,” since “to draw outlines at all, in a symbolic system in which outline is male and body or matter female, is to be a progenitor.”⁹¹ Although the systematic gender argument fails, Damrosch’s emphasis on “drawing outlines” is deft. Antamon is legible not only as a “progenitor” but also as an anatomizing life scientist due to the interior-exterior equivocation in the passage’s central act of lineation. “Line” could also mean “a ‘cord’ of the body,” as in Cowper’s “She pours sensibility divine/Along the nerve of every feeling line.”⁹² A parallel ambiguity in the word “draw” makes the inky drawing of Antamon’s pen operate also as the kind of drawing that pulls something *outward*: “Drawing outlines,” as Damrosch has it, becomes “drawing *out* lines,” and Antamon’s “golden pen” can be read as the more incisive instrument of an anatomist or engraver.⁹³

That “line” was also synonymous with spun flax and its fibers heightens the status of Antamon’s drawing as a counterpart to the anatomy of cruel exposure: “Why wilt thou number every little fibre of my Soul/Spreading them out before the Sun like stalks of flax to dry?” The opposition is precise: Whereas Albion seeks to reveal (internal, self-closed) life by prying the body open and finding “naught,” Antamon’s drawing covers as it dis-covers, drawing out a bodily fiber in a way that also produces a new garment, a soft “integument” (membrane) that the Spectre puts on. The scene thus manages to dramatize knowledge of the body natural as both found and made,

drawn out in a way that does not reduce to either pure construct or pure fact. The line originates both within the Spectre's body and within Antamon's pen, belonging to observer and observed as a negotiable boundary that determines the shape of each. Here both viable form and its science are, between fact and construct, outcomes of bilateral *figuration* that is anything but "mere": the indispensable, integumental "clothing" by which anything comes to be viable or graspable, to and among others, physically and cognitively, at all.

Antamon's uniqueness as an anatomist resides in his hands, "beautiful, flexible" and "soft" in contrast to Tearguts's driving fist. These are hands so soft that they conform to the object of their touch, in a susceptibility to impression content to risk object-like passivity. Indeed, scientific subject and object converge repeatedly in the passage: In addition to the line that is their shared boundary, the Spectre's similarity to "wax" and "clay" finds its likeness in "soft" and "flexible" Antamon; the Spectre's "golden ornaments" echo in Antamon's "golden pen," its lamplike eyes reappear in the "bright" look Antamon casts "thro his windows," and its admiration rebounds in Antamon's smile. In an antitype of that scene of rather malicious group-embryo-weaving cited earlier, the joint softness and contentment of Antamon and Spectre ripple past them to affect the waiting weavers, who "look up from their Loom & prepare/The integument soft for its clothing with joy & delight." Reading outward into an allegory of life science, if the melancholy Spectre was a form of life rendered unlivable by the (Urizenic) reduction of epigenesis to autogenesis, its new "integument" is a livable figure fashioned in concerted acknowledgment of the social labor in generation and its science. In such a "sweet Science," the pretense at impartial and unperturbed inspection would give way to a practice that cultivates epigenesis as a plurivalent configuration from which no party emerges unchanged.⁹⁴

Epigenesis: An Epilogue

In this essay, I have attempted a Blakean pluralization of our understanding of the Romantic era science of living form, arguing that epigenesist science was not limited to theories of internal purposiveness and self-organization, but encompassed theories in which life and shape were drawn from the

configurative pressure (damaging or sweet) of the beings and forces that made up an organism's physical, moral, and historical milieu—theories of embodiment for which viability was conceived as the ongoing work of “myriads.” But reconceptualizing epigenesis in this way has contemporary effects, too, making visible this Romantic science's recurrence in the turn from genetics to “*epigenetics*” in present-day developmental and evolutionary biology.

For in a fresh, self-conscious revival of biology's founding controversy, the molecular genetic perspective that was the prolific achievement of twentieth-century life science has, since the millennium, come under criticism for “preformationism” and been subjected to wide-ranging epigenesist revision.⁹⁵ At stake are the explanatory limits of the biological paradigm known as the “Modern Evolutionary Synthesis,” which drew (Charles) Darwinian natural selection theory, Mendelian population genetics, and molecular biology together under the notion of the “gene” as the fundamental unit of biological identity and heredity. Nobel-winning molecular biologist François Jacob described the “genetic programme” in the early 1970s as both the vehicle of evolutionary history and the signature fate of individual life:

In the chromosomes received from its parents, each egg therefore contains its entire future: the stages of its development, the shape and the properties of the living being which will emerge. The organism thus becomes the realization of a programme prescribed by heredity.⁹⁶

Jacob's echo of classical preformism is unmistakable in our context, above all in the prescriptive temporality that makes living form a *fait accompli*, secured by inheritance from the deep past and invulnerable to present processes and powers. Classical organicism is equally audible wherever “each egg” is said to “contain its entire future” in perfect, autotelic insularity. In fact, in the twentieth century, the doctrine of Weismann's Barrier worked to guarantee the immunity of genetic information not only from the influence of external environments but even from genes' own cellular and somatic contexts. Francis Crick's “Central Dogma” of molecular biology stipulated, moreover, that “living beings are created by an *outward* flow of causality from the nucleus,” impervious to contextual feedback.⁹⁷

In other words, the midcentury answer to biology's two-hundred-year-old question regarding the “missing Building Master” behind living forms

was the univocal authority of genetic information over the body's protein "building blocks." Unlike cultural and personal memory, Jacob stresses, genetic inheritance "does not learn from experience." Redefining living beings as prescribed readouts of an inherited code, recasting their "shape" and "properties" as consequences of this "underlying" program, molecular genetics effectively mooted the question of ontogenetic development that had motivated biology since Romanticism. Institutionally, the rise of genetics meant the decline of once-formidable disciplines devoted to that question—developmental biology, embryology, and comparative morphology—and, with them, of arguments for environmental interaction and learning as causally relevant factors in the physical formation and evolution of living beings.⁹⁸ At its limit, genocentric logic actually banished ontogeny, embodiment, and life-course to the peripheries of biology: Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1976), for instance, cast mortal bodies as mere "survival machines" for immortal genetic "replicators."⁹⁹

"The Century of the Gene" ought to have culminated in the triumphal completion of the Human Genome Project, yet this 2003 event came as something of an anticlimax. "For decades," Evelyn Fox Keller reflected, "we were confident that if we could only decode the message in DNA's sequence of nucleotides, we would understand the 'program' that makes an organism what it is"; yet the project's most significant legacy, in her view, may be the prolific puzzlement it generated regarding DNA's predictive and explanatory power.¹⁰⁰ For in many areas, genetic sequencing fell instructively short of establishing the expected causal links between the code and particular developmental and medical outcomes. Within molecular biology, this discrepancy has catalyzed the precipitous rise of "*epigenetics*," dedicated to taking on the contextual and environmental processes "in addition to genes" that influence the expression or suppression of genetic information. The name deliberately harks back to classical *epigenesis* as an alternative fit to succeed, by preceding, the Modern Synthesis.¹⁰¹

For from quarters as diverse as developmental psychology, experimental embryology, immunology, ethology, ecology, "evo-devo," biological philosophy, and feminist science studies, a once-heretical consensus is emerging: Patterns of gene expression can indeed be modified by environments (intracellular, somatic, amniotic, ecological, cultural), and even by learned behaviors. Such modifications are moreover *heritable*, prompting some to

frankly hail evolution's "Lamarckian Dimension."¹⁰² In ecological developmental biology, "developmental plasticity" names the ways environmental cues elicit diverse morphological outcomes from an invariant genotype, keying newborn bodies to their circumstances in both beneficial and pathological ways.¹⁰³ Such emphasis on organisms' plastic receptivity proceeds in tandem with new attention to their ability to actively modify their environments and bequeath an "ecological inheritance" to their offspring.¹⁰⁴

In groundbreaking news from the Mundane Egg, meanwhile, Gilbert Gottlieb's research on the "psychobiological" embryogenesis of ducklings showed that full auditory development required the external stimulus of birdsong upon the forming ears *in ovo*.¹⁰⁵ The notion that "experience" could "call forth" gene expression and determine physiological outcomes undermined the Central Dogma as well as ethology's traditional division between instinct and learning.¹⁰⁶ As Susan Oyama, preeminent philosopher of the epigenetic approaches that coalesced as developmental systems theory (DST) in the 1990s, remarks: "No egg can develop in a vacuum."¹⁰⁷ Oyama's incidental critique of Urizenic "internalist" organicism—of development as "self-contained, self-guiding, and self-maintaining," as she puts it—goes further.¹⁰⁸ DST attempts a "new epigenesis" attentive to the constitutive action of multiple milieus; in place of the organism or its genome, its researchers take an inclusive "developmental system" as their unit of analysis. What passes between generations, they argue, is not an immaterial code, but a "wide range of resources"—including "other people's ideas, actions, values, habits, and beliefs"—"that are 'passed on' and are thus available to reconstruct the organism's life cycle."¹⁰⁹ As theoretical geneticists Eva Jablonka, Marion Lamb, and Eytan Avital have been arguing for more than a decade, behavioral traditions and symbolic systems are causally crucial for biology when it comes to the transmission of "information" during development and the morphological repetition between generations known as "inheritance."¹¹⁰ We are witnessing, in other words, a revival of the surprising claim central to Blakean, Lamarckian, and Erasmus Darwinian biologies: Animal cultures can act as agents of the regularity we associate with their natures, while natural patterns and structures are more variable than we have assumed.

I have argued in this essay that the basic provocation of epigenesis as a recurrent conceptual formation is less the notion of autotelic self-production with which it sometimes coincides than an insistence on the temporality of

ontogeny—"the process by which the sequence of forms that comprise an individual's life history come into being," in Richard Lewontin's words—as biology's irrepressible explanandum.¹¹ Stressing livable form as an unfinished product of mundane powers and purposes, epigenesists' continuous present tense has counterintuitively historicizing effects: less on the grand scale of evolution across deep, geological time, than across the shorter, mortal interval of "generation" that a being shares with its parents and progeny—an interval that raises challenging questions about the incorporation, naturalization, and transmission of social forms. Such theories cannot properly be called "deterministic" in the way humanists sometimes type the body furnished by biology; but neither does the epigenetic body offer a locus of pure indeterminacy or self-authorizing power, inherently resistant to preexisting strictures, as neovitalist Romanticists would like it to do. Taking embodiment as their problem, not their premise, epigenesists, early and late, instead theorize a being's active and passive shaping into observable fact and viable form.

But perhaps more provocative for our present moment than the redescription of eggs as sites of social conformation—for who, lately, defends the nature-culture divide?—is the observation that, at the near-simultaneous beginning of Romanticism and biology, science and poetry could be allied, and not opposed, in this description. Notions of *need*, *disposition*, *habit*, *milieu*, and *circumstance* were the common property of the natural, human, and social sciences in the epoch of their modern differentiation—and they take precedence again in our later modern mode of calling this differentiation into question.

NOTES

1. Blake may have encountered Harvey's *De generatione* through William and John Hunter, preeminent Scottish medical men at the late-century London vanguard of comparative anatomy, embryology, obstetrics, and vitalist physiology, as per Carmen Kreiter's groundbreaking article on Blake's life scientific sources, "Evolution and William Blake," *Studies in Romanticism* 4, no. 2 (1965): 110–18. See Stefanie Engelstein's luminous exposition of Blake's engagement with William Hunter's anatomical aesthetics in *Anxious Anatomy: The Conception of the Human Form in Literary and Naturalist Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 39–90. For a revelatory account of Blake's virtuosic sophistication with regard to the collusion

between physiology and sentimentalism in a Romantic-era “affective turn” (with specific reference to Harvey and the Hunters), see Steven Goldsmith’s *Blake’s Agitation: Criticism and the Work of Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), esp. 226–61, “Strange Pulse.” And see Tristanne Connolly’s *William Blake and the Body* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 25–72, for psychosexual issues of embodiment and natality. Blake’s publisher Joseph Johnson was a major force in London medical publishing, and Blake engraved illustrations for works including John Brown’s *The Elements of Medicine* (1795), Erasmus Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden* (1791) and *The Poetical Works* (1806), David Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (1791), and Rees’s *Cyclopaedia* (1820); reproduced in Robert N. Essick, *Blake’s Commercial Book Illustrations: A Catalogue and Study of the Plates Engraved by Blake after Designs by Other Artists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

2. William Harvey, *Anatomical Exercitations concerning the Generation of Living Creatures* (London, 1653 [EEBO]), 2.

3. *Ibid.*, ii, xi, 2.

4. *Ibid.*, 250; 222–23. See Shirley A. Roe’s superb overview of the controversy, *Matter, Life, and Generation: Eighteenth-Century Embryology and the Haller-Wolff Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

5. L. S. Jacyna, “Immanence or Transcendence: Theories of Life and Organization in Britain, 1790–1835,” *Isis* 74, no. 3 (1983): 311–29; see also Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) on the cultural politics of London life science in the decades before Charles Darwin. I allude to Sara Guyer’s important theorization of “biopoetics” in the context of Romantic lyric, “Biopoetics, or Romanticism,” *Romantic Circles/Praxis Series: Romanticism and Biopolitics*, ed. Alastair Hunt and Matthias Rudolf, <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/biopolitics>, December 2012.

6. Valuable examples of the first tendency include Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Helmut Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature around 1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), and Thomas Pfau “‘All is Leaf’: Difference, Metamorphosis, and Goethe’s Phenomenology of Knowledge,” *Studies in Romanticism* 49, no. 1 (2010), 3–41; of the second tendency, Charles I. Armstrong, *Romantic Organicism: From Idealist Origins to Ambivalent Afterlife* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine’s introduction to *Romanticism and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–9; Paul Hamilton, “The

Romantic Life of the Self,” in *The Meaning of “Life” in Romantic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Ross Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2009), 81–102; John H. Zammito, “Teleology Then and Now: The Question of Kant’s Relevance for Contemporary Controversies over Function in Biology,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 748–70, and John H. Zammito, “The Lenoir Thesis Revisited: Blumenbach and Kant,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43, no. 1 (2012): 120–32; Roe, *Matter, Life, and Generation*; Reill, *Vitalizing*; Richards, *Romantic Conception*, and Elizabeth B. Gasking, *Investigations into Generation, 1651–1828* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967). Robert Mitchell’s *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), constitutes a splendid, sophisticated exception, especially where it begins to break with epistemological and aesthetic approaches to Romantic life philosophy inherited from Kant (63–73 and 203, e.g.).

7. In a trenchant interlude on Blake in *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 92–93, Noel Jackson anticipates this essay in stressing that in Blake, historical time is coeval with that of the body. In general, however Foucault’s seminal thesis about the supersession of ahistorical “natural history” with a properly temporal “‘history’ of nature” circa 1800 prevails. Foucault’s thesis, too, notably favors strong-form organicism: in *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 274–75, it is Cuvier’s internalist organicism that shatters the spatial continuum of “classical” natural history, “reveall[ing] a historicity proper to life itself”—a heroic act of iconoclasm that clearly prefigures the “breaks” to which Foucault subjects traditional intellectual history. Compare Wolf Lepenies’s *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte: Wandel kultureller Selbstverständlichkeiten in den Wissenschaften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Hanser, 1976), John Lyon and Phillip Reid Sloan, *From Natural History to the History of Nature: Readings from Buffon and His Critics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), and Richards, *Romantic Conception*, for methodologically different accounts that agree in identifying historicism with organicist teleology.

8. Jean-François Braunstein, “Le concept de milieu, de Lamarck à Comte et aux positivismes,” in *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, 1744–1829*, ed. Goulven Laurent (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 1997), 557–71; Jacques Roger, *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century French Thought*, ed. Keith R. Benson, trans. Robert Ellrich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 541–42; Georges Canguilhem, “The Living and Its Milieu,” trans. John Savage, *Grey Room*, no. 3 (2001): esp. 10–11.

9. Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 79–154. Makdisi sets a dazzling

precedent for reading Blake as a *critic* of the rhetoric of self-organization in its biopolitical dimensions, yet for reasons advanced below, I depart from his conclusion that Blake offers a vitalist “life of affirmative and creative *power* . . . of pure potential, of endless striving, of *élan vital*,” as a clear alternative (318).

10. As Evelyn Fox Keller dubs the twentieth century in her book by the same name, *The Century of the Gene* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

11. William Blake, *Milton* 2[b].38, 3[a].4. Except where otherwise noted, Blake citations refer to *Blake's Illuminated Books*, 6 vols., gen. ed. David Bindman (Princeton: William Blake Trust and Princeton University Press, 1991–96).

12. Blake, *Milton* 45[44].15.

13. Thus as Simon Jarvis argues in a fresh dualist reading of Blake, “The natural body is a series of limiting illusions into which we fall”—chief among them the empiricist construction of the body as passively offering up raw sense impressions to be processed into knowledge by a separate mind or soul; see “Blake’s Spiritual Body,” in *The Meaning of “Life,”* ed. Wilson, 13–32. Against this, Jarvis argues, Blake offers the precise equivalency of “Soul or Spiritual Body,” positing “bodily experience [as] immediately and already a kind of knowledge” (25–26). But Jarvis, like George Gilpin, risks eliding the difference between classical empiricism and mechanics (“Bacon, Locke & Newton”) and the newer sciences of life, a difference that Blake tends rather to exploit; see George H. Gilpin, “William Blake and the World’s Body of Science,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43, no. 1 (2004): 35–56. Directing experimental scrutiny toward the unique properties of living matter, the life sciences had in fact shifted natural philosophical focus from the inert bodies exemplary for classical physics to live bodies endowed with active and specific propensities. To represent a living body as something other than “any old kind of external object,” then, Blake need not reject “the body natural” for “the body spiritual”: He need only participate (albeit critically) in the pancultural attempt to do the same. Compare Engelstein, *Anxious Anatomy*, 108, Gigante, *Life*, 2–3, 154, and Richard Sha, *Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750–1832* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 208–12.

14. William Blake “A Vision of The Last Judgment,” in *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed., ed. David V. Erdman, with commentary by Harold Bloom (New York: Random House, 1988), 555.

15. See Goldsmith’s *Blake’s Agitation* for an overview and refreshing exception; Goldsmith’s Blake pioneers a postrevolutionary attitude of impassioned spectatorship, rather than radical politics—an affective turn that prefigures contemporary critical enthusiasms.

16. Blake, *Urizen* 16.6.
17. Roger, *Life Sciences*, 393, 533–42. On epigenesis as “narrative,” see also Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*, 8, and “The Hermetic Imagination in the High and Late Enlightenment,” in *The Super-Enlightenment: Daring to Know Too Much*, ed. Daniel Edelstein (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), 42. And compare Pfau, “All is Leaf,” on the Romantic revision of form and substance into progressive differentiation in time.
18. Harvey, *Generation*, 204, 205, 197.
19. Clara Pinto-Correia’s pioneering study *The Ovary of Eve: Egg and Sperm and Preformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) did much to restore the dignity, rigor, and appeal of preformation theories in their own time.
20. Richard Blackmore, *The Creation: A Philosophical Poem: Demonstrating the Existence and Providence of a God: In Seven Books*. 2nd ed. (London, 1712 [ECCO]), 6:282, 281.
21. On Haller’s legacies, see Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*; John H. Zammuto, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Elizabeth Williams, *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology, and Philosophical Medicine in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
22. Thomas Henry, *Memoirs of Albert de Haller, M.D.* (Warrington, UK: W. Eyre for J. Johnson, 1783), 63.
23. Albrecht von Haller, *First Lines of Physiology*, 3rd ed., ed. William Cullen (1786; New York: Johnson Reprint, 1966), 207–8.
24. “Vorrede” [preface to the German translation of the second volume of Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle* (1752)], in *The Natural Philosophy of Albrecht von Haller*, ed. Shirley A. Roe. (New York: Arno Press, 1981), b3.
25. Blake, *Milton* 24[25].42, 25[26].31–33, my emphasis
26. *Ibid.*, 34.31.
27. *Ibid.*, 23.60, 58–59. Engelstein, *Anxious Anatomy*, 84, points out that this combination of geography and physiology belongs to the genre of the anatomical “atlas,” too.
28. Blake, *Jerusalem* 83.33–37. “Cambel” is a minor, recurring character in Blake’s books, a daughter of Albion whom S. Foster Damon identifies as a “Warring Female” associated with England’s southern coastal counties; *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, rev. ed., with Morris Eaves (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988), 66.

29. For instance, in Wai Chee Dimock's fine argument that Blake uses the flexible temporality of literary history to refute deterministic Newtonian time, "biological time" emerges reflexively as a synonym for the Newtonian kind—despite Blake's awareness that different biologies carried different theories of history with them to term; see Wai Chee Dimock, "Nonbiological Clock: Literary History against Newtonian Mechanics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (2003): 153–77. Jackson notices instead that Blake navigates between "biological determinism" and "naïve idealism" by representing historical, biological, and poetic time as coeval and subject to concerted (if improbable) transformation; see *Science and Sensation*, 99, 92–93.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of A Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 89.

31. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 11, 83, 281; Gigante, *Life*, 158. Compare Erin M. Goss's nuanced assessment of Blakean geneses "between the discursively constructed and the ontologically extant" in *Revealing Bodies: Anatomy, Allegory, and the Grounds of Knowledge in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 89–90.

32. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45–46.

33. *Ibid.*, 234, 243–45.

34. *Ibid.*, 234.

35. See Zammito, "Lenoir," 129; Roe, *Matter, Life, and Generation*, 151–52; Gasking, *Investigations into Generation*, 151; Evelyn Fox Keller, "Organisms, Machines, and Thunderstorms: A History of Self-Organization, Part One," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 38, no. 1 (2008): 44–75; Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 208–16; and Goethe, "Bildungstrieb," in *Zur Morphologie* 1:2 in *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, ed. Karl Richter et al., vol. 12., ed. Hans J. Becker (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1989), 100–102. Among literary critics, Frederick Burwick did admonish that "organicism" was a partial and polemical "ism" at the turn to the nineteenth century; see Introduction to *Approaches to Organic Form: Permutations in Science and Culture* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), ix–xvii.

36. Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation*, ix.

37. *Ibid.*, 4.

38. Gigante, *Life*, 3, 126, 25.

39. Blake's description of the embryo "Orc" in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, 17.21–23.

40. Blake, *Book of Los*, 4.49–50.

41. Blake, *Urizen*, 3.6, 1.

42. *Ibid.*, 3.3, 21; 4[a].18; 4.16; 12.52.

43. Ibid., 21.25–26; Coleridge, letter to Thelwall, 31 December, 1796; qtd. in Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 124.
44. *Urizen*, 4[a].19, 38–40.
45. Ibid., 9.20, 4.38, 26.21, 14.13.
46. Ibid., 10.20, 10.6, 9.21, 9.32, 21.26.
47. Donna Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.
48. Blake, *Urizen* 10.23–24, 4.28–29; see Gigante, *Life*, 106–54, esp. 107, 115, and Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 313–25.
49. Blake, *Urizen* 10.5, *Milton* 28.19. On this point, extensively, see John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and compare Goldsmith on the uncanny persistence of mechanism in the scientific and sentimental discourse of the heart (*Blake's Agitation*, 226–61).
50. Blake, *Urizen*, 3.2, 5.8.
51. Ibid., 9.27, 4.3; 9.37–38.
52. Ibid., 23.4.
53. Ibid., 3.42–43.
54. Ibid., 4.8–11.
55. Ibid., 4.9, 23.4–6, 3.
56. Ibid., 7.12; 12.28–32; see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 152. Eyes, nostrils, and mouth crowd Urizen's foreshortened face, in contrast to his full-body organ of touch, the skin, which maintains expansive contact with the sea. In Mitchell's study, activating the neglected sense of touch is the precise work of Blake's flat, elemental backgrounds: Their refusal of perspectival depth undermines the safe distance between figure and ground, consciousness and its objects, and "restores a tactile, synaesthetic quality to pictorial form" (59–60).
57. Susan Oyama, *Evolution's Eye: A Systems View of the Biology-Culture Divide* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 126–27.
58. Blake, *Urizen*, 17.21–23, 33–36.
59. Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life*, 2nd ed. (London, 1796. [ECCO]), vol. 1, chap. 39, sec. 4, 496.
60. Ibid., 1.39.4:492–93.
61. Since "configuration" is the physiological name for an idea in Darwin, his understanding of epigenesis as "configuration" opens the relay between physical and mental registers that Darwin requires for both his materialist psychology and his account of animal development from fibril to person: a relay between *figure* as bodily shape, and *figures* of thought and speech; see *Zoonomia*, 1.2.2:11, 3.1:14–17, 14.1–2:108–17, 22.3:258, 39.8:529.

62. Lamarck and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire were appointed to the newly created chairs in zoology at the museum in 1793; two years later, Cuvier joined to teach comparative anatomy; see Toby Appel, *The Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate: French Biology in the Decades before Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11–39.

63. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, *Recherches sur l'organisation des corps vivans . . . précédé du discours d'ouverture du cours de zoologie donné dans le Muséum national d'Histoire Naturelle*, ed. Jean-Marc Drouin (1802; Paris: Fayard, 1986), 58; compare Xavier Bichat, *Physiological Researches upon Life and Death*, trans. F. Gold, notes by F. Magendie (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1827), 9–10. Pietro Corsi points out that Lamarck's *Recherches* garnered more contemporary attention than his now better-known *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809); see *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France, 1790–1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xii.

64. Lamarck, *Recherches*, 60.

65. *Ibid.*, 76, 62, 76.

66. *Ibid.*, 76, 70.

67. *Ibid.*, 77.

68. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, *Philosophie zoologique, ou exposition des considérations relatives à l'histoire naturelle des animaux* (1809; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4; on this cooperation, see Elizabeth A. Williams, *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology, and Philosophical Medicine in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). The term *biologie* appeared among multiple authors between 1797 and 1802 (Roose, Burdach, Lamarck, and Treviranus) and vied with other names for a science specifically devoted to life; see Joseph A. Caron, "'Biology' in the Life Sciences: A Historiographical Contribution," *History of Science* 26, no. 73, pt. 3 (1988): 223–68.

69. Lamarck, *Recherches*, 44.

70. *Ibid.*, 89. As Alan Bewell, Noel Jackson, Kevis Goodman, Noah Herringman, Catherine Packham, and Martin Priestman have variously revealed, Darwin's synthetic and wide-ranging literary science foregrounds "the constitutive role of literary, political, and other cultural elements in natural history and philosophy," presenting nature as "inescapably bound up with global commerce, industry and consumption" (Alan Bewell, "Erasmus Darwin's Cosmopolitan Nature," *ELH* 76, no. 1 [2009]: 20). See Noel Jackson, "Rhyme and Reason: Erasmus Darwin's Romanticism," *Modern Language Quarterly* 70, no. 2 [2009]: 171–94; Kevis Goodman, "Uncertain Disease: Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading," *Studies in Romanticism* 49, no. 2 [2010]: 197–227; Noah Herringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004]; Packham, *Eighteenth-Century*

Vitalism; and Martin Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times* [Farnham, Eng.: Ashgate, 2013]).

71. See Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy*, 1–105; and Jackson, “Rhyme.”

72. See Desmond, *Politics of Evolution* 25–100, 236–75; and also Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

73. For the vagaries of Lamarck’s historical reception, see Antonello La Vergata, “Il Lamarckismo fra riduzionismo biologico e meliorismo sociale,” in *Lamarck e il Lamarckismo: Atti Del Convegno: Napoli, 1–3 Dicembre 1988* (Naples: La città del sole, 1995), 182–214; and Laurent, ed., *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck*.

74. Canguilhem, “The Living and Its Milieu,” 167.

75. *Ibid.*, 8.

76. A gesture most true to William Harvey’s initial gambit for epigenesis: A life is “formed,” he argued, by “the same matter by which it is sustained and augmented” (*Generation*, 227).

77. Representing embryogenesis as an induction of (external) pressure and motion predicated on (an innate) power/susceptibility to be so moved, such epigenesis theories articulate something like the biological correlate of Judith Butler’s double-aspect theory of subject formation: “A power *exerted* on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power *assumed* by the subject” (11), an involution of power marked by the signal trope of “turning back upon oneself” (3) as the ungrounded moment of identity-formation; see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11, 3.

78. Canguilhem, “The Living,” 26, 11.

79. Compare Richard Lewontin on “niche construction” in “Gene, Organism and Environment,” in *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*, ed. Susan Oyama, Paul E. Griffiths, and Russell D. Gray (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 55–66; and Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society: A Poem, with Philosophical Notes* (1803; New York: Garland, 1978), canto 1, 1:255–69. Given the explicitly life-sustaining role of environing milieus in Lamarck’s *Recherches*, I depart from Canguilhem’s ultimate assessment of Lamarckian biology as a “naked vitalism” that depicts a desolated relation between organism and milieu.

80. Canguilhem, “The Living,” 27–28.

81. See Richard A. Burkhardt, “Animal Behaviour and Organic Mutability in the Age of Lamarck,” in *Lamarck e il Lamarckismo*, 80, for Lamarck’s self-conscious acknowledgment of circumstantial force in his own intellectual development.

82. William Blake, *An Island in the Moon*, in *Complete Poetry*, 454.

83. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 22.20–24.

84. Blake, *Milton*, 21[20].16–17. Laura Quinney justly assesses Antamon's action as "palliative care": We are "left longing," she writes, "recalled to our transcendental vocation but not raised to it" (142). Her welcome reading thus moves quickly past Antamon in search of more "radical therapy" (143), whereas I am interested in the persistence of this qualified and compromised dimension in Blake; see Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

85. Blake, *Milton*, 27.3, 25[26].27.

86. *Ibid.*, 27.3, 2; 27.10–11.

87. See Engelstein's kindred stress on Blake's "mutating" objects, grasped as "part of a history of interactions between creator, observer, and world" (*Anxious Anatomy*, 76).

88. Blake, *Jerusalem*, 27.8–20.

89. Blake, *Europe*, 16[17].17–19.

90. Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 24–25.

91. Leo Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 320.

92. *OED*.

93. For the "intimate connection" between engraving and anatomy, see Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 32.

94. "Con-science," in Engelstein's terms: science predicated on "encouraging the *flexible* interaction of bodies no longer envisioned as discrete individuals" (*Anxious Anatomy*, 71).

95. This section draws heavily on two dozen seminal perspectives collected in Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray, eds., *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*; on the analyses of the epigenetic turn collected in *From Epigenesis to Epigenetics: The Genome in Context*, ed. Linda Van Speybroeck, Gertrudis Van de Vijver, and Dani de Waele (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 2002); and on Scott F. Gilbert and David Epel's textbook, *Ecological Developmental Biology: Integrating Epigenetics, Medicine and Evolution* (Sunderland, Mass.: Sinauer Associates, 2009). For the framing of epigenetics as a renewal of epigenesis against modern genetic preformation, see especially Oyama's Introduction to *Cycles*, 4. And compare Pfau's kindred examination of contemporary "evo-devo" as an echo of Goethean life science (albeit under the sign of organicism) in "All is Leaf," 26–29.

96. François Jacob, *The Logic of Life: A History of Heredity*, trans. Betty E. Spillman (New York: Random House, 1973), 2.

97. Oyama, *Evolution's Eye*, 47; see also James Greisemer, "What Is 'Epi' about Epigenetics?" in *From Epigenesis*, ed. Speybroeck, Van de Vijver, and De Waele, 98–99.

98. See Gilbert and Epel, *Ecological Developmental Biology*, Appendix C.

99. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21.
100. Fox Keller, *Century*, 7.
101. Speybroeck, Van de Vijver, and De Waele, eds., *From Epigenesis*, 2–3.
102. “The Lamarckian Dimension” is the subtitle of geneticist-theorists Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb’s groundbreaking *Epigenetic Inheritance and Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); see also their short piece with E. Avital, “‘Lamarckian’ Mechanisms in Darwinian Evolution,” *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 13, no. 5 (1998): 206–10; and Edward Steele, Robyn Lindley, and Robert Blanden, *Lamarck’s Signature: How Retrogenes Are Changing Darwin’s Natural Selection Paradigm* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1998), xvii–25.
103. On this point, see Gilbert and Epel, *Ecological Developmental Biology*; Jablonka, “Systems”; H. Frederik Nijhout, “Ontogeny of Phenotypes,” and Peter H. Klopfer, “Parental Care and Development,” in *Cycles of Contingency*, ed. Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray, 129–40, 167–73.
104. Kevin N. Laland, F. John Odling-Smee, and Marcus W. Feldman, “Niche Construction, Ecological Inheritance, and Cycles of Contingency in Evolution,” in *Cycles of Contingency*, ed. Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray, 117–26. See also Lewontin, “Gene, Organism and Environment,” 63–65; and Darwin, *Temple of Nature*, 1:255–69.
105. Called “experimental teratology” in the nineteenth century, this field was arguably inaugurated by Lamarck’s protégé at the museum, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772–1884). Geoffroy focused Lamarckian zoology on development by systematically manipulating the environmental conditions surrounding mundane eggs to study their effects on animal organization; see Brian K. Hall, *Evolutionary Developmental Biology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 60.
106. Gilbert Gottlieb, “A Developmental Psychobiological Systems View: Early Formulation and Current Status,” in *Cycles of Contingency*, ed. Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray, 42–50.
107. Oyama, *Evolution’s Eye*, 88.
108. Susan Oyama, “Terms in Tension: What Do You Do When All the Good Words Are Taken?” in *Cycles of Contingency*, ed. Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray, 185, 187–88.
109. Oyama, Introduction to *Cycles*, 3; *Evolution’s Eye*, 70. Although developmental systems theory (DST) invokes “self-organization,” the term does not imply an autotelic capacity separating life from the rest of material nature. As Bruce H. Weber and David J. Depew explain, at stake is rather the thermodynamic, “prebiological fact” that some physical and chemical systems are “autocatalytic, chemically dissipative systems before they are anything else”; DST thus operates against the “autonomy of biology” standpoint. See

Bruce H. Weber and David J. Depew, "Developmental Systems, Darwinian Evolution, and the Unity of Science," in *Cycles of Contingency*, ed. Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray, 242–44, 246; and Oyama, "Terms."

110. Jablonka and Lamb gloss their Lamarck-positive alternative to gene-centered neo-Darwinism at the outset of *Evolution in Four Dimensions* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005): "There is more to heredity than genes; some hereditary variations are nonrandom in origin; some acquired information is inherited; evolutionary change can result from instruction as well as selection" (5). The text explores the interaction between genetic, epigenetic, behavioral, and symbolic/linguistic systems in biological heredity. See also their *Epigenetic Inheritance*, and, with E. Avital, "Lamarckian Mechanisms."

111. Lewontin, "Gene, Organism and Environment," 60.

Concerning Hunger: Empire Aesthetics in the Present Moment*Mrinalini Chakravorty*

“Hunger is hunger,” Karl Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*, “but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail, and tooth.”¹ This description of our habits of consumption makes culture integral to perceptions of hunger. For Marx hunger is primarily understood as the desire to satisfy a want or gratify a need. This is precisely where culture as the interplay of desire, production, consumption, and custom seems to enter into the equation; the manner in which hunger satisfies wants, Marx intimates, is civilizational. Whether and what we eat and the mannerisms through which we assuage our hunger—in terms of the utensils used, the food eaten, whether “meat” alone satiates as opposed to vegetables, or the custom of eating itself—produce cultural differences.

Indeed, the vagaries of desire are also ingrained in the way Marx defines commodities themselves on the basis of hunger. “A commodity is, in the first place,” Marx writes, “an object outside us, a thing that by its

properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference.”² In other words, the metaphysical subtleties of the commodity spring from the varying kinds of hunger, as desires or as want or need, that it provokes. This is to say that the desire for things is itself split between organic needs that “spring from the stomach” and the more ethereal desires of “fancy.” What is vital in Marx’s formulation is that commodities are those very objects that muddle distinctions between material need and symbolic desires. Hunger, in short, at least as far as it is yoked to things, is thus culture-forming precisely because its materiality is indistinguishably tied to the symbolic or spectral dimension of commodity culture.

The lesson Marx teaches is that hunger for food is like hunger for things: Both signal our simultaneous entry into material, cultural, and aesthetic or representational circuits of desire. This essay explores the changing valences between hunger’s political economy and its cultural dimensions in colonial and postcolonial art. As Supriya Chaudhuri observes, “In the material world that we inhabit, those who eat and those who starve live in the same moment.”³ It is this simultaneity of presence marked by a harrowing and vast gulf in sentient experience that art and liberal philosophies on hunger seek to explain and to redress.

I argue that the transnational present is uniquely shaped by the enduring ties between the crises of hunger understood either as a problem of self-interested or of disinterested politics. Moreover, the valence that hunger acquires within modern political philosophies is directly linked to its aesthetic representational forms. This is to say that hunger’s aesthetics—represented in photography, painting, and sculpture—closely replicates its political scheme, both of which are alert to “a slippery aesthetics of hunger” that vacillates between need and desire, interest and disinterest.⁴ This interrelation between political and aesthetic form ultimately inflects the extent to which notions of altruism and alterity, as well as sympathy and apathy, become part of the prevalent humanitarian discourse about hunger.

Indeed, the story of hunger in the modern day has only partially been told. Most of what has been written on hunger from a cultural perspective

focuses on its prevalence in early and modern Europe, leading up to the end of the Second World War and the decolonial period.⁵ Piero Camporesi, for instance, writes of the prevalence of hunger in Europe from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment when large swathes of the population were vagrant, and processions of the hungry, on the move in search of work, scavenged for food. He describes the strange and desperate practices that accompanied unyielding hunger: the plugging of anuses to ensure that bowels seemed full, the ingestion of dung and urine, as well as cannibalism.⁶ Mike Davis describes the famine epidemics that haunted Victorian England as a global “holocaust” tied to colonial practices of wealth accumulation and weather prediction.⁷ Primo Levi’s memoirs of life in Auschwitz recall the harrowing experience of hunger as coercion that was part of the daily struggle against state captivity and torture during the actual Holocaust.⁸ In contrast, James Vernon’s incisive history of modern hunger examines the rise of humanitarian concern over hunger in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Focusing on famines in Ireland and India, as well as the governmental and scientific advent of nutrition schemes, Vernon shows how the development of the welfare state in imperial Britain became “organized around the conquest of hunger, or at least its banishment to lands still awaiting ‘development.’”⁹ Likewise, Maud Ellman’s focus on starvation and hunger strikes by medieval ascetics, early women suffragettes, as well as Irish republicans meditates on the “complicity between themes of hunger, writing, and imprisonment” in the West.¹⁰ It is only recently that Parama Roy has explored how the “psychopharmacopoeia of empire” foregrounded “the stomach . . . as a kind of somatic political unconscious in which the phantasmagoria of colonialism came to be embodied.”¹¹

By exploring the interrelations and interrogations between hunger art and liberal discourses about the hungry, this essay extends previous scholarly work into the contemporary moment. It tests the premise that aesthetic representations of hunger are inflected by the intrusions of liberal affects such as sympathy, charity, and self-interest. Further, it shows how a closer examination of transformations in what we might loosely call “hunger art” in colonial and postcolonial India sheds light on how the problem of hunger subtly captures the many interdependencies between older and newer forms of globalization.

To begin, I offer the following provisional hypotheses that the rest of the essay will address:

1. In art, as in political economy, the avowal or disavowal of an affective response to hunger is key to how privation introduces questions about the scale and urgency of hunger as a global problem.
2. Aesthetic representations of hunger struggle with its attendant anthropocentric dimension in order to convey its proper affective charge.
3. The central problematic hunger art poses is one of mimetic participation—how to enter into an ethical relationship with the hungry through art.
4. And finally, the transition in hunger art from the colonial to postcolonial period is reflected by the disappearance of the human subject and the prevalence of the sovereign object, a trend that follows materialist discourses about hunger that critique liberal assumptions.

Hunger in the Age of Liberalism

The affective charge we associate with being hungry has deep resonances with imperial economies, both moral and political. Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, Charles Darwin, and others associated hunger with the colonies through the affects of self-interest, benevolence, and sympathy. Modern political economies championing development were deeply compelled by the affective dimensions of hunger. Hunger as a sign of extreme material need invoked sympathy, charity, or benevolence and exposed these affects as the universal condition of being conscientiously human. At the same time, the hungry came to stand for the structurally disposable elements of humanity necessary for the vigor, aspirational impulses, and industry of a free-market, survivalist economy. It is this splitting of hunger along these two axes that I am interested in, especially as it is taken up not only as a problem of political economy, but also a cultural or aesthetic one that has an enduring influence even today.

The cultivation of sympathy and a hardened disavowal of it are endemic to the morality that circumscribes early liberal theories. The modern inse-

curity over how hunger should be viewed, whether as a sign of civilizational backwardness, a universal human condition, a populist/resistant art form, a socialist concern, or an individual expression of austerity or sacred practice arises partially in response to how it was understood within early liberal thought. Imperial political economies advanced theories of market capital but did so by engaging a moral economy, one that revolved around the fraught problem of subsistence. Modern economies were seen as compelled by the affective dimensions of hunger precisely because extreme deprivation was assumed to commonly summon sympathetic, charitable, or benevolent feelings.

In the *Wealth of Nations*, for example, Adam Smith argues that feudal subsistence economies must give way to free-market exchanges if the problem of dearth is to be alleviated.¹² As Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, Donald Winch, Catherine Gallagher, Carol Blum, Geoffrey Gilbert, and many others have noted, Adam Smith is often viewed as “the great visionary of capitalist abundance” for promoting the idea that an expanding market economy inevitably delivers opulence for all.¹³ Smith sees “the most perfect freedom of trade” as a panacea for “society advancing to opulence,” explaining that hunger is a symptom of overly regulated markets (*Wealth* IV.9.21, I.5.15). Smith’s influential vision of liberalism heralds a golden society yet to come where unencumbered market play, based on “trust” and industriousness, would produce a future of intoxicating prosperity replete with a universal guarantee of “the wine which we all have occasion for.”¹⁴

This altruistic philosophy of a free-market economy, nevertheless, requires that some be bested in their efforts, or, as Smith puts it, be “thrown all out of their ordinary employments.” But still Smith is quick to reassure us that it “would by no means follow that they [the workless] would thereby be deprived of either employment or subsistence” (IV.2.42). What is striking here is that the utopian optimism that Smith has regarding a liberal political economy requires that its sudden implementation cause *loss* of work, while suturing its promise to the prospect of work and subsistence for all.¹⁵ That is, even if free markets were to cause opportunities for industriousness to evaporate, such turbulence is seen as a temporary necessity for a more expansively productive and sustaining society to emerge. In this account of modernity, the question of subsistence appears as ground zero of progress itself, and with it comes a valorization of a brand of individual industriousness

that thrives under adversity in order to eradicate any crises with regard to subsistence.¹⁶ As Christian Marouby observes elsewhere in this book, the entanglement between economic and basic life processes is in fact endemic to how political economy conceived itself at this time: “There may well be in the eighteenth century,” Marouby writes, “a contamination of economic thinking by biology, even an incipient conception of economic development as an organic phenomenon.”¹⁷ In such an environment, subsistence emerges as the most natural ground for linking questions having to do with sustenance of life with those of economic existence. Smith declares, for instance, “As subsistence is, in the nature of things, prior to conveniency and luxury, so the industry which procures the former must necessarily be prior to that which ministers to the latter” (III.1.2).

For Smith, freedom from need or hunger depends on a theory about social and economic development whose interrelated touchstones are self-interest, industriousness, civilizational identity, and, only on occasion, charity.¹⁸ All these elements in the long run continue to define our discourses of hunger. About the reciprocity between individuals, Smith asserts: “But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them” (I.2.2). Here, charity, or benevolence toward others, takes a back seat to self-interest. It is by provoking others’ self-interest toward his own that an individual, Smith suggests, might come to benefit from mutual exchange. Crucially, markets thrive, Smith writes, not because of charitable actions, not because people address themselves “to the humanity” of others, but because of appeals “to their self-love.” In other words, he cautions, one must “never talk to them [other individuals] of our own necessities but of *their* advantages” (I.2.2). One key dimension to the kind of political future Smith advocates is of a rugged, self-interested individual who knows that all charity is born from self-interested action.¹⁹

Of course, even in this scheme there are others, such as “beggars,” the working poor, and “savages,” who subsist only by the grace or benevolence of others. Yet here too Smith qualifies the extent to which gestures of kindness are sufficient to keep them afloat. Of the beggar as an exception, Smith writes:

Nobody but a beggar chuses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens. Even a beggar does not depend upon it entirely. The charity of well-disposed people, indeed, supplies him with the whole fund of his subsistence. But though this principle ultimately provides him with all the necessities of life which he has occasion for, it neither does nor can provide him with them as he has occasion for them. (I.2.2)

Here is a careful calibration of the role charity or some other kind of humanitarian attitude toward the dearth others experience may play in a modern political economy. Clearly, the beggar is a unique recipient of human kindness divorced from self-interest and is in this sense outside the political economy of opulence Smith describes. But as Smith points out, in his view, this kind of benevolence, while meeting the threshold of what is needed to subsist, never actually satisfies the beggar's more wayward desires. What beggars hunger after, it seems, is always in excess of what charitable giving may provide.

In the larger spectrum of his work, the beleaguered case Smith makes for charity pierces the differences between wealthy and working class, as well as the nation of Great Britain and its colonies. In more generic terms, Smith's model parses a divide between civil and noncivil or "savage nations" (I.1.4). While in Great Britain, Smith finds that "industry is perfectly secure" and "it is as free or freer than in any other part of Europe," China comes to represent the worst specter of "savage" want (IV.5.82). Smith writes: "The poverty of the lower ranks of people in China far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations in Europe. . . . Any carrion, the carcass of a dead dog or cat, for example, though half putrid and stinking, is as welcome to them as the most wholesome food to the people of other countries" (I.8.24). Thus the Chinese are deemed so abject, their hunger so desperate that it cannot be assuaged. China is placed outside the domain of modernity altogether, in a scene of absolute horror where consumption appears as a form of subsistence shaped by the detritus of death itself. This implies that there are insurmountable cultural differences that may guard against their attaining the kind of social opulence Smith idealizes.²⁰

Smith mediates this, however, by suggesting that in other instances civilizational lag results from stifling the kinds of self-interested charity that governs free markets, and it is this that is a contributing feature to forms of beggary in Britain's colonies. Hence, he counters the Chinese example with

numerous other colonial ones, including “the present state of Bengal” and the “English settlements in the East Indies.” These he maintains are fertile places without natural barriers to subsistence, where the artificial regulations of markets have led “three or four hundred thousand people [to] die of hunger in one year” (I.8.26). For Smith, the colonial play of cultural difference thus shadows the idea of charity as self-interest. For the colonial other—as a relative and not absolute other—who may be living with hunger, development itself becomes a promise of help. To put it another way, Smith’s account of markets expanding freely across the globe, supposedly according to their own impulses, explains both the hunger of other totally “exotic” nations and becomes, in the proximal colonial instance, the source of its solution.

If Smith saw hunger as an indication of incomplete liberalization, Malthusian models of hunger advocate a brutal morality about its providential necessity to check untamed population explosions and spur invention. Arguing that for man sexual desire trumps the work required to acquire food, Malthus makes the case that the power of population is thus “indefinitely greater” than earth’s capacity to provide subsistence for all.²¹ Because populations must ultimately be balanced with levels of available subsistence, hunger, Malthus argues, exists as nature’s necessary corrective. Whereas Smith saw liberal markets as a way to dispel hunger, Malthus signals that hunger is an obstinate yet important element of modern life precisely because it both checks the untrammelled effects of desire and motivates industriousness. Hunger in this account of liberal development is what creates incentive and leads to economic activity. “The necessity of food for the support of life gives rise,” Malthus asserts, “to a greater quantity of exertion than any other want, bodily or mental.”²² Such exertion for Malthus is of utmost importance if society is to improve itself, instead of succumbing to idleness and leisure. Dispelling the possibility of a world without hunger, Malthus co-opts hunger as a source of invention: “Necessity has been with great truth called the mother of invention,” he declares, adding that “some of the noblest exertions of the human mind have been set in motion by the necessity of satisfying the wants of the body.”²³

The dark side of Malthus’s view of hunger is that at the same time as it appears as a natural condition that can never be done away with, it also stigmatizes the hungry as somehow lacking the necessary skills, resolve,

or industry to survive the rigors of life. Thus hunger appears as a natural, indeed providential, verdict that no one can intercede against, as in this moment when Malthus describes famine as “the most dreadful resource of nature”:

Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature. The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. . . . Should success [of other death-causing agents] be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world.²⁴

Following in the wake of other kinds of “extermination” such as epidemics, pestilence, and plague, famine is seen as an unavoidable condition of the population-food hypothesis that forms part of life’s natural rhythm.

For Malthus, hunger also encompasses a moral economy of labor and productivity, one that distinguishes the torpor and indolence of those outside modernity and the compulsive industry of those within. Rather than charitable forms of self-interest, hunger stridently manages the divide between those who are properly disciplined to the rigors of modern labor and those such as the poor or the savage who are not. He envisions that if the savage were not “roused from his torpor by the cravings of hunger or the pinchings of cold,” he would “slumber forever under his tree” and “sink into listless inactivity.”²⁵ Hence hunger becomes emblematic of a state of savagery given to indigence and laziness. By extension, it also signifies the kind of “craving” that potentially moves humans from this state of listlessness toward the rigorous discipline and activity necessary to be civilized subjects of the free market. The story of hunger Malthus recounts is of a ruthless natural force that grips those who do not possess the moral fiber to escape its vicious leveling effect.²⁶ As numerous scholars have already observed, Malthusian assumptions played a key role in nineteenth-century colonial responses to famine in colonies.²⁷ The Malthusian population thesis for the colonies extended an improbable belief that colonialism had so benefited the colonized that primary population checks of warfare, epidemic diseases, and vice were no longer active, making famines inevitable as native populations burgeoned beyond levels of food production necessary for survival. In fact, acceptance of Malthusian principles was so widespread in the colonial civil

service in India, as S. Ambirajan, John Caldwell, Lance Brennan, and others show, that the government neither acknowledged that the export of grains from India to Europe was a severe contributing factor to the wave of famines that occurred in Orissa (1866), Bengal (1874), and Madras (1878) soon after direct rule of India by the crown commenced, nor felt the need to intervene to stave off mass starvation for fear that intervention would lead to dangerous levels of population explosion.²⁸

Malthus's vision of the nature of hunger is thus a biopolitical one that spurns the kind of limited benevolence Smith allows. This bifurcation between the two great champions of the worldwide expansion of liberalism on how hunger should be viewed—as an occasion for self-interested humanitarian outreach or a necessary evil in no need of social aid—is formative for how hunger is still perceived globally today. For Malthus, hunger not only is world-dividing in its demarcation of savage from civilized, but it also reveals a flawed assumption that benevolence toward the infirm should in fact be part of modern sensibility. Indeed, as his repudiation of the Elizabethan Poor Laws shows, he deems poverty essential for the cultivation of a “spirit of independence” and judges attempts to ensure the welfare of the indigent as a “pernicious tendency” that encourages “dependency” and defeats a necessary spirit of enterprise.²⁹ Poverty, like hunger, for him is thus both to be reviled, “held disgraceful,” and a natural “stimulus” that should not be diluted with kindness.³⁰ The picture Malthus paints of modernity's relationship to human weakness, whether it be in terms of material lack, diseases, or hunger, is a stark one. This dispensation of modernity provides that we need to become hardened against all forms of deprivation as instruments of nature and as instructions for how to live otherwise.³¹ No doubt such attitudes toward welfare and the hungry linger today, but as I have shown, their moral valences are weighed against another view that sought the redress of hunger as an act of self-interested benevolence that supposedly enriches all.

It is well known that Malthus's views influenced Darwin's social science of evolution as well as the eugenics of racial development. What is not so well mapped is how the idea of hunger—as a survival instinct—is explained by Darwin as an evolutionary principle. Interestingly, Darwin adopts the Malthusian view that hunger is indeed a basic natural instinct that governs natural selection. Yet in his account given in *The Descent of Man* he consid-

ers why the core “natural impulses,” as he calls them, of “self-preservation, hunger, lust, vengeance” are often exceeded by social or moral compulsions.³² Unlike Malthus, who dismisses the relevance of feeling or action to relieve the distress of others, Darwin sees the human social sense as a distinctive, evolutionary trait separating humans from animals. He claims that social instincts such as sympathy for others are stronger than natural instincts such as hunger because they confer pleasure, are more enduring, situate humans in a moral community, and are born of our need for consensus and habit.³³ Whereas hunger is a fleeting instinctive desire that once satiated is “not readily or vividly recalled,” social instincts toward others, Darwin implies, are more historical.³⁴

According to Darwin, social instincts importantly confirm our humanity aside from our animality because they produce long-term feelings of satisfaction in giving service or aid to others, situate us in community, produce guilt or “misery” about the past in instances when we ignore them, and are grounded in “the power of language” that creates habitual expectations of “public good” and “common opinion” to which we feel the need to adhere.³⁵ Above all, unlike Malthus, Darwin sees sympathy as the kernel of what drives the social instinct: “But it should be borne in mind,” Darwin asserts, “that however great weight we attribute to public opinion, our regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows depends on sympathy, which, as we shall see, forms an essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation-stone.”³⁶

Darwin’s evolutionary frame, it must be understood, anchors the experience of hunger itself to biology and self-preservation and divorces it from social feeling. But by insisting on sympathy as a significant social instinct, he echoes Smith in the suggestion that the hungry or the specter of hunger in others stimulates responses that are intrinsic to collective human welfare. In fact, Darwin cites Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the work of the Scottish social psychologist Alexander Bain in making the case for sympathy’s centrality to the human condition because it is yoked to “our strong retentiveness of former states of pain and pleasure.”³⁷ Quoting Bain, Darwin writes, “Hence, ‘the sight of another person enduring hunger, cold, fatigue, revives in us some recollection of these states which are painful in the idea.’ We are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, in order

that our own painful feelings may at the same time be relieved.”³⁸ In Darwin’s scheme, then, hunger seems oddly to signal swiftly passing primal sensations at the same time as it provokes more lasting intersubjective, even affective one might say, social responses. These latter seem to spring from the understanding that however temporary, hunger maintains a residual hold on human sociality.

The picture Darwin paints of human ascendance, like Smith’s, is, however, civilizationaly fractured. The feeling of sympathy that he judges to be inherent to moral sense does not extend to civilizational others, those designated as “savage,” “barbarian,” or “rude” people in the racially inflected language of the nineteenth century. Darwin, for instance, argues that “most savages are utterly indifferent to the sufferings of strangers, or even delight in witnessing them.”³⁹ Conversely, while savages remain “wholly indifferent about a stranger,” he claims that “a civilized man” will “disregard the instinct of self-preservation” and risk his own life to save another, “though a stranger.”⁴⁰

In Darwinian terms, this spontaneous and nondeliberative desire to help another who is a complete stranger is evidence of sympathy’s social evolution as the most perfect moral sense, and it may be witnessed only in advanced societies. The evolutionary theory of hunger that Darwin invents has several far-reaching consequences. While retaining hunger as an indisputable biological impulse, it moves us to regard its social implications in terms of affect. Sympathy (rather than love or fulfillment or pleasure or negative emotions such as disgust) is seen as the most evocative emotional response to hunger as human distress. Further, the specter of hunger is itself seen as having civilizational value, breaching a schism between self and other, our own cultures and communities and those that are strange to us. For Darwin, the West remains unquestionably exemplary of sympathetic morality, and yet the West’s dubious responsiveness to hunger holds out the possibility that it too may be uncivilized by Darwin’s metric.

As we will see in the next sections, it is these ambivalent and contradictory pulls of self-interest, charity, and sympathetic attachment, as well as ideas of industriousness and indolence, that resound within liberal discourses about the hungry and that influence attempts to represent hunger visually. Hunger’s aesthetics, in other words, are deeply enmeshed by ideations of what hunger signifies within liberal biopolitical theories about it.

Famished under a Tree

The curious coincidence of a tree unites images of devastation from two separate colonial era famines in India. The first (Figure 8.1), a photograph of the Madras Famine of 1876 by Willoughby Wallace Hooper, a colonel in the British army, shows emaciated children sheltering near the roots of an immense and gnarled tree.⁴¹ In the image a boy's upright yet famished body is most notable for its sparse skeletal frame whose lines seem to merge with the veins of the tree under which he sits propped. Another boy lies supine, his wasted body lying spent amid the outgrowths of the tree's roots. If we look carefully, a tiny bird perched on the tree's lower left root limb offers us what might be a naturalizing point of view on this scene of devastation. Whatever feelings of empathy are aroused by this photograph of starving children, the bird and the tree seem to anchor it to the natural world; scenes of famine, the image implies, are devastating but natural. Moreover, while the landscape remains fecund, the starving colonized are uniquely shown



FIGURE 8.1. Willoughby Wallace Hooper, "Forsaken." Photograph of the Madras Famine of 1876–78. Courtesy Royal Geographical Society, Image No. S0001997.

to be lacking. The plates and other vessels are notably empty of content and cast aside. In the colony, hunger appears as a human deprivation reserved exclusively for the colonized. The hungry, it seems, are outside the bounds of nature and improperly placed in relation to manufactured objects—bowls, plates, utensils—whose correct use might alleviate their need. Ultimately, whether these boys seek and find momentary reprieve beneath the shade of this tree or whether they have simply been placed there to enhance the aesthetic composition of the photograph is a question the image leaves in the balance. It is a question that doubtless affects the play of sympathy that the photograph impels.

The other image (Figure 8.2) is by the Bengali artist Chittaprosad Bhattacharya. Chittaprosad and Bangladeshi artist, Zainul Abedin, sketched the fall-out from the Bengal Famine during the Second World War.⁴² More than half a century later, Chittaprosad's drawing of the famished (much like some



FIGURE 8.2. Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, "Deserted Villages." Sketch of the Bengal Famine of 1943. Image courtesy: DAG Modern Archives, New Delhi.

by Abedin not shown here) resurrects the tree in Hooper's composition.⁴³ Working with cheaper media such as ink, charcoal, and woodcut, the artist does not aspire to the kind of rich photographic realism that is inherent to Hooper's frames. However, the resemblance between the earlier and later frames remains uncanny. In Chittaprosad's etching, "Deserted Villages" (Figure 8.2), a withered elderly woman sits scraping a pot of food on the knotted roots of a tree. The charcoal lines of the drawing mesh the tree's reedy form to the body of the woman so that they both appear as one. The apparently empty pot literally takes the place of the woman's stomach. Abedin's charcoal etchings also often frame the gaunt bodies of mother and child in the foreground of a robust tree, mooring famine victims in a natural scape.

Common to these artistic attempts to represent devastating levels of colonial hunger is the idea that the hungry need to be placed in relation to larger natural and lived worlds. It is only when the work communicates some relation between the hungry and other forms of animate and inanimate existence that the terms of its affective charge become apparent. As aesthetic forerunners, Hooper's photographs, Zahid Chaudhary points out, "provided the basis for the entire tradition of famine photography, complete with repetition of essentially the same ethical conundrums surrounding the documentation of suffering."⁴⁴ In the colonial context, rendering extreme hunger of the colonized visually ties the experience of suffering that these famine victims endure to their reception by sympathetic colonial spectators. The question of alleviating the pain of mass-scale hunger in the colonies is thus left to whether these images can compel charitable responses from those colonizers for whom hunger of this fashion is remote. Hence, sympathy, as Chaudhary further notes, is a "suspect sentiment" in the colonial scene.⁴⁵ Certainly in Hooper's case, the deliberate staging of famine victims for "photographs that were taken for commercial ends" makes them ethically all the more dubious.⁴⁶ Hooper's photographs of the Madras Famine (Figure 8.3 is a typical example) nonetheless set the stage for how famished subjects were visually presented in aesthetic frames in order to invoke a sympathetic response from liberal audiences often at a far remove.

Hooper's photographs, published widely in the British press, engendered a humanitarian discourse about hunger in Britain in which sympathy became a spectacularly driven, if incompletely realized, affect. Hooper's posed



FIGURE 8.3. William Willoughby Hooper, “Objects deserving of gratuitous aid in Madras.” Madras Famine Photograph, 1876–78. Courtesy of Royal Geographical Society, Image No. S0002006.

images of starved and enervated famine victims immediately raised questions about how a visual image manipulates sympathy as an affect. Even at the time of their publication, “reports circulated in *Punch* and other publications,” Chaudhary writes, “that Hooper would group famine victims together, take his photograph, and then ask them to move along without providing any assistance.”⁴⁷ Clearly, the taking of the photographs themselves was mired in questionable and less than sympathetic intent. The kind of “sympathetic mirroring” that Hooper’s photographs produced also had an uncertain ethical compass that couldn’t necessarily confirm the liberal viewer’s altruistic participation. Again, Chaudhary is prescient in observing that “Hooper’s famine photographs, and possibly all famine photography, precariously serve two contradictory ends: they satisfy a latent sadistic desire even as they provide the basis for a sympathy that could lead to altruism.”⁴⁸ As such, even when aroused, sympathy often remains a rudderless affect evoked by such images of the hungry. Even when famine photography “begins the relay of sympathetic technology,” Chaudhary

writes, “[the photographs] do not in fact guarantee a referent for sympathetic mirroring.”⁴⁹ In other words, while the momentary play of sympathy that these images inaugurate may produce charitable outcomes (as Darwin prefers), they might just as well satisfy Malthusian convictions about the frailty and indolence of civilizational others, or the conviction that the colonies are not sufficiently self-interested and industrious (as for Smith). Indeed, even temporally, the extreme emaciation of the bodies in the photographs themselves precludes direct charitable intervention, since by the time the images circulate the assumption is that the individuals portrayed will most likely have already perished. In short, these photographs permit viewers to be let off a moral hook that would require them to act in response to them.

It is this open-ended play of “sympathetic mirroring” without “guarantee of referent” that Hooper’s photographs initiate and that all subsequent efforts to visually represent the plight of the hungry in the colonies attempt to answer.⁵⁰ The tree that yokes the famine victims in the drawings by Chittaprosad and Abedin marks resonant asymmetries between an earlier era of famine representation and a later one. For Hooper the tree anchors the famished to a naturalized world from which they are clearly eradicated. Hooper’s tree realizes a toughened *terra firma* against which the famished appear as waste. The photograph’s realism emphasizes this stark contrast and holds it in place as the limit of any sympathetic attachment with the hungry that it could engender. In contrast, Chittaprosad’s and Abedin’s trees merge with the bodies of the victims. Minimalist in form and media, the landscapes they present, drawn in infirm and sparse lines, seem as bereft as the scrawny human forms they render. Here the artists’ stark line drawings seem to compromise any suggestion that there is a luxuriant natural world separate and unaffected by the austerity of famine. If sympathetic attachment is diverted by the tree’s seeming permanence in Hooper’s image and reverts to reinforcing the colonial spectator’s sense of security, the natural world itself appears slight and ethereal in the hunger art by these artists of the anticolonial period. In short, the tree as metaphor becomes a sign for how sympathy itself works as liberalism’s most constant, yet also mobile and unpredictable, affect.

Of course, it is important to realize that Chittaprosad and Abedin, like Hooper, were artists of their time. The Bengal Famine of 1943, which they represented, occurred during the last years of British colonial rule in India

when anticolonial sentiments were rife. There was by this time a prior history of famine art—such as the images by Hooper—that had activated public response to colonial administration even in Britain. So, by the time of the 1940s, hunger's humanitarian influence was already so socially entrenched in the sympathetic imagination of the British that the effects of these paintings greatly alarmed the Raj already contending with anticolonial demands for autonomy. For instance, Chittaprosad, who was born in pre-partition Bengal, published his paintings in the communist publication *The People's War* and in a massive ethnography of the catastrophe titled *Hungry Bengal*.⁵¹ Both publications were censored and burned by the British, with a few surviving originals only recently discovered in the possession of Chittaprosad's niece. Chittaprosad himself lived an obscure bohemian life, dying relatively unknown and destitute in 1978.⁵² By contrast, Zainul Abedin exhibited his famine portraits widely during his lifetime, including in galleries in London.⁵³ His initial renown was for his famine paintings that made him a cause célèbre among critics of colonial rule, and he eventually came to be known as *shilpa-acharya* or the foremost artist of the nation of Bangladesh.⁵⁴ Both Chittaprosad's and Abedin's drawings are in fact spectacular critiques of the dearth produced by British colonial control, which mandated export of India's grain resources at a time of severe drought. However, in their work sympathetic attachment consolidates anticolonial sentiments just as Hooper's work favors a self-interested colonialism. Because liberal sympathy is indeed without referent, it is directed here to other no less predictable ends.

So it is that Chittaprosad and Abedin frame hunger in the colonies in its most dire terms as end-of-life scenes to evoke a gendered form of sympathy that can mobilize outrage against colonial culture. That is, these artists participate in what Margaret Kelleher has termed "the feminization of famine" in order to reproduce certain ideas of the infirmity and vulnerability of colonized life (Figures 8.4, 8.5, and 8.6).⁵⁵ Representations of hunger that highlight the plight of women and children, as do some of these images of mother and child, align perfectly with anticolonial nationalist arguments about the dangers an intrusive, predatory foreign culture poses for the cultural sanctity believed to be exclusively preserved in the domestic arena by Indian women. As Partha Chatterjee has argued, Indian nationalists resolved the question of women's lack of participation in public life by contending



FIGURE 8.4. Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, Bengal Famine Portraits, “Humanity Dehumanised.” Midnapur, 1940s. Image courtesy: DAG Modern Archives, New Delhi.



FIGURE 8.5. Zainul Abedin, from Famine Sketches (1943). With permission of Mainul Abedin.



FIGURE 8.6. Zainul Abedin, from *Famine Sketches* (1943). With permission of Mainul Abedin.

that Indian cultural purity could only be maintained at home by preserving a virtuous and secluded femininity.⁵⁶ It is the disruption of such a femininity that these hunger artists depict when they paint women and children as those most urgently stricken by lack of subsistence. Within the anticolonial milieu in which they are sketching the ravages of famine, these portraits have the added signification of depicting a singular colonial violence against feminized home culture that nationalists view as emblematic of India's civilizational purity.

Additionally, it must also be noted that like Hooper's images, these anti-colonial portraits of the famine also clearly situate the spectator outside of the temporality of their sketches. Given their dire situation, subjects of the paintings are presumably already dead by the time the paintings are widely seen. However, because these images are drawn, they do not mirror the scenes of catastrophe in as direct a way as do photographs. Here the form and technology of representation of the artwork impose a transformation that is distancing. Unlike photographs that focalize the actual emaciation

of the body, these sketches call sharp attention to the memorialization of cruelty without redress. Instead of the horrific sight of a human body plainly atrophied by hunger, these sketches inspire other kinds of mimetic identification. For instance, Chittaprosad deliberately names the figures he sketches, ensuring that his work offers an ethnographic archive of those unnamed individuals particularly devastated by colonial famines. In one scene, a starved and decomposed body that has become carrion for vultures (Figure 8.7) is named as a historical person, “Kshetramohan Naik” of “Midnapur” district in Bengal in *Hungry Bengal*.⁵⁷ The painting serves as a way of commemorating his life, its title suggesting that it is offered in place of the “last rites” this person lacked. Mimesis of the hungry, its aesthetic representation, that is, stands in for the historical void that is often the fated condition of the deprived.

If the central problematic hunger art poses is one of mimetic participation—how to enter into an ethical relationship with the hungry through art—the attempt to visually represent hunger also continually recalibrates relations between human and nonhuman forms. Thus, while the



FIGURE 8.7. Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, “Unhonoured and Unsung.” Image courtesy: DAG Modern Archives, New Delhi.

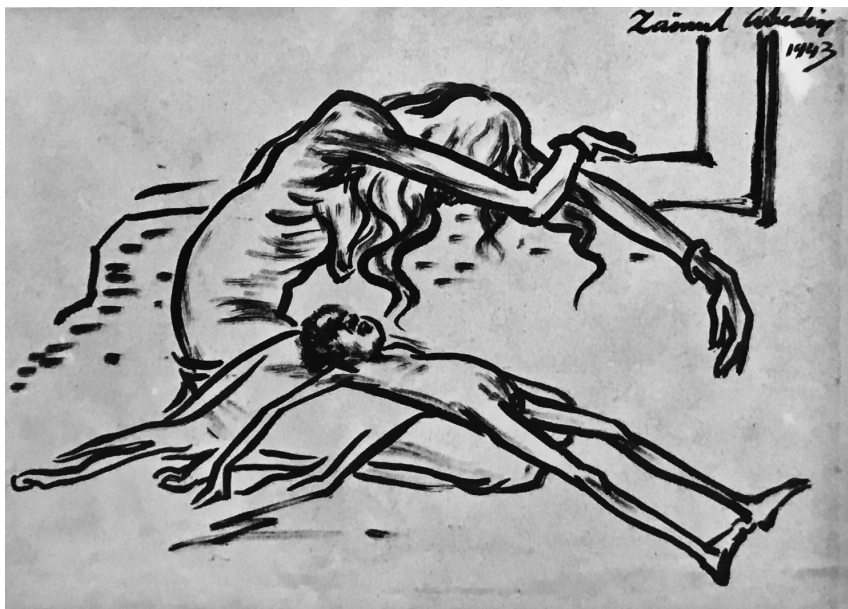


FIGURE 8.8. Zainul Abedin, from *Famine Sketches* (1943). With permission of Mainul Abedin.

tree and utensils in Hooper's photography capture the liminal humanity of famine victims, sketches of famine in the anticolonial period go further. In them morbid scenes (Figures 8.6, 8.7, and 8.8) convey the experience of colonial hunger as a "death world" in Achille Mbembe's terms, a form of utterly debased, dehumanized existence.⁵⁸ The hungry human body is finally shown as utterly lifeless, intimating that mimetic participation with hunger can no longer find easy resolutions in acts of charity and benevolence, however sympathetically motivated, that could offer redress to bodies in distress. By representing famine victims in their most spent form, these images provoke us to contemplate the realm of the inanimate as the zero-sum question of how hunger's ethical charge may be felt. This opening suggests that hunger poses an ethical problem because it is more about our relations to things and people as objects, or commodities, rather than about sympathetic identification with others as self-same subjects sharing our common humanity. This is in a sense what Marx intimates in linking

hunger to the materiality of consumption, the question with which I began. It is a question that, as will be seen, begins to be seriously pursued by critiques of liberal commodity culture that attempt to situate hunger in the era of globalization.

For the moment, it is enough to note that colonial and anticolonial attempts to grapple with hunger's representational canvas largely rely on sympathetic participation, which draws on strands of a cultivated liberalism that insists that humans must experience others' sentience. At the same time, by showing the effects of extreme hunger, hunger art of the decolonial period reveals the way in which liberal notions of sympathetic identification fail to serve the culturally out-of-bounds subject of privation. In short, representations of hunger are split along an indeterminate, vacillating interpretive lens about what affects the hungry engender and to what ends.

Hunger and the Postcolonial Critique of Liberalism

Questions about the celebratory assumptions underlying market modernization were fiercely raised with respect to poverty and hunger by nineteenth-century socialists such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Arnold Toynbee, and Rosa Luxemburg.⁵⁹ In the middle of the twentieth century in the period of decolonization, social economists such as Karl Polanyi and Edward Thompson powerfully suggested that hunger within the British nation and in the colonies was not so much separate from the modern world system, but an intrinsic aspect of the forcible entry of many uninitiated social actors into capitalism's coercive economy. In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi thus wrote that famines in India in the late-nineteenth century, for example, were caused "by the free marketing of grain combined with local failure of incomes."⁶⁰ These critics, as Mike Davis shows, used socioeconomic grounds for disputing liberalism's claims that it offered progress, showing instead that the entry into modernity brought with it "the rapid and violent disruptions of the basic institutions" of its "victims" such that native ways of life—community and artisan practices—were liquidated.⁶¹ This cynical analysis of liberal capital attended to Luxemburg's axiom that "force is the only solution open to capital," which "employs force

as a permanent weapon"; she saw famine, hunger, and poverty as its main casualties.⁶² In this moment, hunger comes to represent a kind of crisis point of failure in liberal political economy. In the process, the questions that Smith, Malthus, and even Darwin previously engaged about hunger's spectacular nature and affective pull are cast aside as impertinent to the impersonality that is global capital.

As others have noted, the Marxist social and economic critique of industrial development in the West were anticipated by anticolonial nationalists all over the empire from Ireland to India, Kenya, and Egypt. The key thrust of these arguments turned on exposing colonial famine, drought, and poverty as a consequence of empire building and not some innate feature of the colonies' backwardness. The idea that imperial liberalism worked through a ruse about its universal benevolence and that this is part and parcel of development's uneven legacy in postcolonial societies has been more recently articulated by economists such as Amartya Sen, Meghnad Desai, Partha Dasgupta, Jean Drèze, and others.⁶³ Sen's critique of famines, for instance, is that catastrophic shifts in social access, what he calls "entitlements," cause mass-scale food deprivations, rather than the lack or availability of food itself. "Starvation," Sen writes, "is a characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not *being* enough food to eat."⁶⁴ The political economy of hunger in this account stresses systemic upheavals in social relations as its cause, rather than resource and individual resourcefulness. For Sen, starvation occurs because certain social "entitlements" such as legal and economic "rights of access to resources that give control of food" are jeopardized for some.⁶⁵ When socially scripted "endowments" such as property rights, labor, and economic access no longer "map" on to former "entitlements," the acquisition of food is compromised and people starve. Sen's influential analysis makes resource allocation and access the cornerstones of his critique of development. It also insists that "starvation and hunger" be regarded as "the irreducible core of absolute deprivation . . . the centre of the concept of poverty."⁶⁶

The political economy of hunger, it may be said, has veered in very different directions in seeking solutions and causes to its societal presence. Liberalism has advanced its moral fabric by alternately arguing that hunger is antecedent to it, that it inspires a much-needed work ethic, or is seminally

necessary to its civilizing and disciplining methods. Others, meanwhile, have sought to expose hunger's presence as the dark underbelly of development. The case that modernity necessarily produces a culture of efficiency through its affective responses to dearth (as the ones Smith, Malthus, and Darwin make) which are—whether they be ones of sympathetic self-interest or the active cultivation of disinterest—essential for universal human progress is one that social economists have lately disputed. Yet as is evident even in the case Sen makes about the socialization of hunger, there is an aversion to thinking of hunger simultaneously in economic, cultural, and affective terms. In fact, given its legalistic approach to hunger in terms of entitlements, resources, and rights, Sen's critique of the legacy of development nevertheless remains within its logical frame, advocating that resource management, democratic modernization, and the promotion of individual rights will bring us to a time of development as freedom. Thus, for instance, Sen claims that "to view poverty as an issue in inequality . . . seems to do little justice to either concept."⁶⁷ This means that entitlements that compensate for hunger, in his view, may be claimed solely on the basis of rational improvements made to social infrastructures, rather than by reforming cultural or emotional commitments. However, our view of hunger's modern cultural map can be complete only when we understand that it is drawn on the basis of a composite of biological, affective, cultural, and socioeconomic discourses about it.

The Disappearing Human and the Rise of the Object

Our present humanitarian discourses of hunger—whether they address global inequity through pleas to affective empathy and altruism or reject such affective gestures—address the moral economy of accumulative liberalism. This is especially the case in aesthetic representations of hunger in the postcolonial moment. Contemporary artists who stake out how such a material event as hunger, experienced largely by racialized and subaltern others, may be cast newly explore how hunger may be seen as an irruption against the dominative tendencies of liberal sentiments. If, in the first instance, hunger art responded to the affective signatures that attached to hungry subjects, then postcolonial hunger art, following prescriptions initiated

by predecessors such as Chittaprosad, elaborates on hunger's material dispensations by showcasing it as a quotidian crisis of consumption and production. In late modernity, hunger becomes a problem of the growing sovereignty of inanimate objects. Not surprisingly the emaciated human body in fact vanishes in these installations, replaced instead by a flood of ubiquitous objects. The excessive presence of objects raises different questions, rather than those of empathy and moral rectitude, about why lack persists in societies that are hyperproductive.

Echoing interventions in Marxist critiques of liberalism, contemporary hunger art provokes critical questions about the inequities of resource allocation in the present. The sculptor Subodh Gupta, whose work has been compared to that of Damien Hirst, offers a particularly striking instance of such a materially conscious aesthetics. Trained as a painter, Gupta is based in New Delhi and works experimentally with a variety of media. His work, encompassing sculpture, installation, painting, photography, performance, and videography, has been exhibited widely in India and abroad. In one set of installations (Figures 8.9, 8.10), Gupta incorporates everyday food objects that are ubiquitous throughout India, such as the steel tiffin boxes (lunch boxes popular across the social spectrum) as well as thalis (steel plates), pans, bicycles, and milk pails. From such ordinary readymade items the artist produces sculptures that reflect on recent economic transformations.

Gupta's installations clarify hunger's biopolitical stakes as a problem of things; hunger here is cast as the artificial consequence of a phantasmatic, object-obsessed capitalism. As in Chittaprosad's etching, the human form appears reduced to its skeletal dimensions, but this time as a skeleton whose outsize dimensions are made apparent by the gross overproduction of utensils whose very excessive manufacture indicates lack (Figure 8.9). Other installations compel us to insert our own bodies in the midst of an abundance of food objects that hang empty and entirely detached from the use for which they are meant, that is, to facilitate eating. Indeed, the grossly mushrooming utensils conjure treelike forms but only to manifest a clear and uncanny difference from the natural world, one that gestures to the grand scale of correlation between consumption and the anthropocene era of the present that goes beyond the individuated personal experience (Figure 8.10). Of the objects themselves and their users, Gupta says, "I am using these hundreds of utensils to form this new singular form, in this case a globe, and that is



FIGURE 8.9. Subodh Gupta, “A Very Hungry God” (2006). Stainless steel installation. Courtesy of Subodh Gupta Studio.

more of the narrative that I have control over. It is not a story of an individual as much as a cosmic, collective tale. It’s fascinating to me how a small, beat up aluminum pan from a poor woman’s kitchen seems so trivial compared to a planetary mass, yet when you really think about it, that’s what our society, our planet, comes down to; thousands of these dishes.”⁶⁸

Where ultimately does this admittedly limited survey of various artistic and discursive views of hunger lead us? We may say that hunger art in the present time—such as the work of Gupta—attempts to synthetically reproduce for us the various staggering yet everyday economies of consumption and need under the frenzied effects of late-capitalist accumulation. They compel us to reassess—by inserting ourselves into the matrix, or by way of the difficulty they pose for interpretation (precisely because there is no dying human figure to for us to sympathize with)—the ways in which self-interest and sympathy have long circulated as the crux of accumulative liberalism. Hunger signals another order of the natural world where nature and culture



FIGURE 8.10. Subodh Gupta, “Specimen No. 108” (2015). Stainless steel installation. Courtesy of Subodh Gupta Studio.

are no longer split, where emaciated bodies in eternal landscapes are not the only signs of its catastrophe. Rather than harnessing our feelings to alleviate the problem of hunger, contemporary aestheticians ask that we engage detachment, distance, and disinterest itself as modes of relation in order to recognize our complicity within larger planetary forces of resource distribution that make hunger a condition of modernity. Only then, perhaps, an ethical response to hunger may be possible.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 92.
2. Karl Marx, “The German Ideology: Part I,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 199.
3. Supriya Chaudhuri, “Hunger: Some Representations of the 1943 Bengal Famine,” in *The Writer’s Feast: Food and the Cultures of Representation*, ed. Supriya Chaudhuri and Rimi B. Chatterjee (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 227.

4. James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8. Arguing that hunger is as much a “cultural category” as it is a “material condition,” Vernon observes that “we need to take seriously the very slipperiness of hunger as a category” (8). We might think of the aesthetics of how hunger is represented as one means to approach its cultural valence.

5. I use the term *decolonial* to mark a sense of the continuing work of decolonization (of the mind, after Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o), but also in the world systems sense in which Walter Dignolo uses it. *Decoloniality* as a term championed by Dignolo and others in Latinx studies suggests an oppositional, outside politics, that continues to mark the transition between the era of colonial famines to the dearth that accompanies decolonization. Anibal Quijano’s “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 168–78, is an important forerunner for thinking about the synergies and dissonances encompassed by decoloniality.

6. See Piero Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and *The Land of Hunger* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996).

7. Mike Davis’s *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001) is a path-breaking study of the mismanagement of natural resources that exacerbated colonial famines.

8. See Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man* and *The Truce*, trans. Stuart Wolf (London: Sphere Books, 1987).

9. Vernon, *Hunger*, 4.

10. Maud Ellman, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 16. In her influential study, which brings psychoanalysis to bear on questions of appetite and aesthetics, Ellman examines the relation between hunger and artistic representation in the West in a sustained way.

11. Paroma Roy, *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 6, 7. Roy’s book is an important contribution that considers the way in which culturally prescribed food habits influenced and even determined practices of colonial contact.

12. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) (London: Methuen, 1904); hereafter cited in text. <http://www.econlib.org/LIBRARY/Smith/smWN15.html>. On this point, Smith argues for the active deregulation of the corn trade, for example, as the only sure way to prevent famine (III.1.2).

13. Geoffrey Gilbert, “Adam Smith on the Nature and Causes of Poverty,” *Review of Social Economy* 55, no. 3 (1997): 273. See also Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Istvan Hont and Michael

Ignatieff, "Needs and Justice in the Wealth of Nations: An Introductory Essay," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–44; Carol Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

14. It is interesting, however, that wealth and prosperity ultimately remain ambiguous virtues in Smith's philosophy, while industrious activity alone signals the kernel of civilizational success. As Geoffrey Gilbert points out, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* "Smith takes a skeptical, ironic view of striving for material goods and wealth" (Gilbert, "Adam Smith on the Nature and Causes of Poverty," 273), writing that poverty's most harrowing effect is a psychic pain caused by social isolation that drives the poor man's son toward "unrelenting industry" to better his condition (275). Yet, as Gilbert observes, Smith remains ambivalent about such strivings because for the poor who manage to better themselves, the realization comes too late that wealth accumulation "produces no real happiness" (276), but that such a ruse is crucial to national interests, as Smith remarks: "It is this deception [that wealth and social status define happiness] which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind" (Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976], 183–84). Additionally, Smith sees subsistence and religion as two unproductive influences that curtail market freedoms. He writes, "The laws concerning corn may every-where be compared to the laws concerning religion," because people are so acutely concerned about their bodily life ("subsistence in this life") and afterlife ("happiness in a life to come") that laws regarding the market become unduly swayed by irrational public opinions to the detriment of progress (*Wealth* IV.5.79).

15. Of course, Smith's utopian ideas about the eradication of world hunger and wealth accumulation are influenced by the Poor Laws of the Elizabethan period that, however contentiously, inaugurated ideas of social welfare in early modern Britain. This was followed in the eighteenth century by food riots and other protests by the poor that kept dearth in England front and center politically. See Vernon's *Hunger: A Modern History* for a complete picture of how these various social developments unfolded to affect one another historically.

16. Discounting the value of laws regulating work life, Smith sees a market free of any legal restraint and the individual's natural impetus to subsist or "better his condition" as sufficient grounds for the utopia of wealth that he imagines (*Wealth* IV.5.82; *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Part IV, 177–92).

17. Christian Marouby, “Looking for (Economic) Growth in the Eighteenth Century” in this volume. Marouby traces the interdependence of biological and economic analogies in Smith’s thought to the influence of the physiocrats, specifically the doctrines of Francois Quesnay. For Smith, however, the common denominator between biological and economic systems—aside from nature itself—is not circulation, as Quesnay imagines, but the division of labor.

18. In “System and Subject in Adam Smith’s Political Economy: Nature, Vitalism, and Bioeconomic Life” (in this volume), Catherine Packham identifies the vitalist aspects of Smith’s philosophy, writing that “Smith’s political economy constructs the economy itself as a living system, akin to a natural organism, . . . comparable to contemporary conceptions of the ‘animal œconomy’ of a human body or other living being.” Thus it is not surprising that hunger—or at least its corporeal specter—should inform Smith’s views because even as Smith’s subjects are motivated by self-interest, they are also subject to “the proto-biological determination of nature’s system” as Smith “collapses history into nature.” Packham accurately notes that this tendency toward natural explanations in Smith’s work, to see the *homo economicus* as natural qua nature, elides “a historically contingent, culturally specific account of the human” by Scottish Enlightenment science.

19. Gilbert, “Adam Smith on the Nature and Causes of Poverty,” 278.

20. See Robert C. Allen, Jean-Pascal Bassino, Debin Ma, Christine Moll-Murata, and Jan Lutten Van Zanden, “Wages, Prices, and Living Standards in China, 1738–1925: In Comparison with Europe, Japan, and India,” *Economic History Review* 64, S1 (2011): 8–38, for an illuminating evaluation of Adam Smith’s assumptions about China’s development. Drawing on imperial records in China and colonial records in Europe, the authors show that “unskilled laborers in major cities of China and Japan . . . had roughly the same standard of living as their counterparts in central and southern Europe for the greater part of the eighteenth century,” concluding that Smith’s “rise of the West” thesis for the early modern world is questionable (31). Thus, while China lagged behind London, in terms of standard of living it certainly was not that different from other parts of Europe and Asia. See also William Lockwood, “Adam Smith and Asia,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 3 (1964): 345–55, for a contrarian view, arguing that Smith’s “intellectual Chinoiserie” anticipates modern theories of China’s nondevelopment by identifying certain qualities in Chinese society, such as contempt for foreign trade, internal pillage, lack of justice, and indolence as reasons for its economic stagnation. Others have influentially argued, in a revisionist mode, that in fact China and other countries in Asia surpassed Europe in the eighteenth century, see, for instance, Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 2001); Prasannan Parthasarathi, "Rethinking Wages and Competitiveness in the Eighteenth Century: Britain and South India," *Past & Present* 158, no. 1 (1998): 79–109; Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); and James Lee and Wang Feng, *One Quarter of Humanity: Malthusian Mythology and Chinese Realities, 1700–2000* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

21. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), chap. 1. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4239/4239-h/4239-h.htm>.

22. *Ibid.*, chap. 18.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

25. *Ibid.*, chap. 18. Conversely, Malthus celebrates the industriousness of Europe, writing that "the industry of [its] inhabitants has made these countries produce a greater quantity of human subsistence" (*Principle*, chap. 4). He sees the paternalism of the Poor Laws as challenging the natural resourcefulness that hunger produces, which, in his account, is the only thing that allows for the exertion needed to produce, thus leading to the conquest of hunger itself.

26. Malthus is insistent that social "evils" such as hunger and poverty "exist in the world not to create despair but activity." "We are," he instructs, "not patiently to submit to it, but to exert ourselves to avoid it" (*Principle*, chap. 19).

27. See Lance Brennan et al., "The Development of the Indian Famine Codes: Personalities, Politics, and Policies," in *Famine as a Geographical Phenomenon*, ed. Bruce Currey and Graeme Hugo (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), 91–112; John C. Caldwell, "Malthus and the Less Developed World: The Pivotal Role of India," *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 4 (1998): 675–96; and S. Ambirajan, "Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the Nineteenth Century," *Population Studies* 30, no. 1 (1976): 5–14.

28. On this point, see Caldwell, "Malthus and the Less Developed World," 679; Ambirajan, "Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy," 8; Brennan et al., "The Development of the Indian Famine Codes," 92.

29. Malthus, *Principle*, chap. 5.

30. Malthus writes: "Hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful. Such a stimulus seems to be absolutely necessary to promote the happiness of the great mass of mankind, and every general attempt to weaken this stimulus, however benevolent its apparent intention, will always defeat its own purpose" (*Principle*, chap. 5).

31. Although writing earlier than Malthus, Joseph Townsend espouses a similar view when he spells out the meaning of hunger in its harshest terms, writing that it enforces “decency and civility, obedience and subjection, to the most brutish, the most obstinate, and the most perverse” and that “it is only hunger which can goad” the poor “to labor” because “it is the most natural motive to industry.” See *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (1786) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 23–24.

32. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin, 2004), 136.

33. *Ibid.*, 121.

34. *Ibid.*, 122.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 129. Smith’s views on sympathy are different from Darwin’s because for Smith sympathy is always an incomplete affect. On Smith’s views of sympathy produced by the hunger of others, Zahid Chaudhary observes in *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 186: “Adam Smith notes that bodily feelings such as extreme hunger are not easily transmitted through the technology of sympathy” because, as Smith puts it in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “when we come across instances of others’ extreme starvation, we cannot sympathize with the experience . . . because ‘we do not grow hungry’ in reaction to such a scene.”

38. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 129.

39. *Ibid.*, 142.

40. *Ibid.*, 134.

41. As William Digby, Mike Davis, Zahid Chaudhary, and others note, the causes of the famine in Madras were multiple, ranging from the failure of monsoon rains to the colonial theft of surplus grains to local price fixing and hoarding. Chaudhary cites Digby as noting that the number of fatalities resulting from famine and subsequent diseases and deaths were close to 10.3 million. See William Digby, *The Famine Campaign in Southern India (Madras and Bombay Presidencies and Province of Mysore) 1876–1878*, vols. 1 and 2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1878).

42. Approximately 4 million people died in the famine in Bengal that lasted from 1943 to 1945. As Chaudhuri, following Amartya Sen and Paul Greenough, remarks, the causes of the famine included “the effects of wartime hoarding and profiteering,” “governmental boat-denial and rice-denial policies,” “the rural-urban divide,” “the brown-spot disease,” the “cyclone,” “inequality in income and entitlement,” “the influx of refugees and troops,” and “the government’s procurement system.” See Supriya Chaudhuri, “Hunger: Some Representations of the 1943 Bengal Famine,” in *Writer’s Feast*, 228.

43. Supriya Chaudhuri points to the formative influence of these artists in altering forever the social realism of Bengali art; the famine became, as Chaudhuri notes, the catalyst for thinking beyond realism's mimetic power to relieve suffering of such vast magnitudes. She writes: "Few will forget the searing images of emaciated human bodies and hungry cattle, dogs and crows in the sketches, paintings and figures produced by Zainul Abedin, Gobardhan Ash, Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, and Ramkinkar Baij in those [famine] years. It might even be argued that for Bengal, the real crisis of modernist representation is constituted by the famine and the events surrounding it. These events demanded, for those who lived through them, the sobering, 'truthful,' witness of social realism: yet at the same time, they lay beyond the reach of realism, beyond the comforting illusion of representational adequacy that the ideology of realism propagates" ("Hunger," 233).

44. Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire*, 169.

45. *Ibid.*, 171.

46. *Ibid.*, 171, 161. See also Chaudhary's excellent account of Hooper's controversial career, first photographing the Madras Famine for sale to British photographic studios and then ordering executions in his capacity as an Army colonel in Burma that he would photograph. Hooper was eventually censured by Parliament for the latter by being transferred from Burma.

47. *Ibid.*, 169.

48. *Ibid.*, 176.

49. *Ibid.*, 186.

50. *Ibid.*

51. All images by Chittaprosad in this essay are from Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District by Chittaprosad, in November 1943*, facsimile copy (New Delhi: DAG Modern, 2011).

52. See Kishore Singh, *Chittaprosad: A Retrospective, 1915–1978* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2012) for more examples of this artist's work.

53. See Abul Manzur, Nazrul Islam, Abul Hasnat, and Rosa Maria Falvo, eds., *Zainul Abedin: Great Masters of Bangladesh* (Milan: Skira, 2013) for examples of the breadth of Abedin's work.

54. Abedin is credited with having started the first museum of art in Myenmansingh district of Bangladesh.

55. See Margaret Kelleher, introduction and chapter 4, "Literature of the Bengal Famine," in *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

56. Chatterjee's "The Nationalist Resolution to the Woman's Question," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 233–53, offers a definitive explanation of how gender was parsed within an anticolonial movement that remained very much patriarchal even as it agitated for freedom from British governance.

57. Chittaprosad, *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapur District*, by Chittaprosad, in November, 1943. (Bombay: New Age, 1943), n.p.
58. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 40.
59. See especially Engels's *Condition of the English Working Class* (1845), Arnold Toynbee's *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution* (1888), Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), and Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* (1858).
60. Karl Polyani, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), 167.
61. Ibid. Also quoted in Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 10.
62. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge, 1951), 371. The preface to Davis's *Late Victorian Holocausts* has a more complete account of the critical interventions against liberal theories of subsistence that arose in the mid-twentieth century.
63. See volumes 1–3 of *The Political Economy of Hunger*, ed. Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Meghnad Desai's "The Economics of Famine," in *Famine*, ed. G. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
64. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1.
65. Ibid., 45. In Sen's view, "the entitlement approach" rightly and exclusively "concentrates on those means of commanding food that are legitimized by the legal system in that society" (45). Hence, his view of hunger is undergirded by the assumption that hunger is a problem of law and order.
66. Ibid., 22.
67. Ibid.
68. "An Interview with Subodh Gupta," by Christina Chua, in *The Artling*, November, 4, 2016. <https://theartling.com/en/artzine/2016/11/04/interview-subodh-gupta-Singapore-Biennale-2016>.

**The Hero Takes a Fall: Gravity, Comedy,
and Darwin's Entangled Bank**

Timothy C. Campbell

Many moments linger when reading Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, but one stands out more than the others. Detailing the etymology of play in Greek drama, Huizinga notes that

comedy and tragedy alike come under the heading of a competition, which as we have seen, is in all circumstances to be called a play. The Greek dramatists composed their works competitively for the feast of Dionysus. . . . As to the mood in which the drama was performed, it was one of Dionysian ecstasy and dithyrambic rapture. The player, withdrawn from the ordinary world by the mask he wore, felt himself transformed into another ego which he did not so much represent as incarnate and actualize.¹

Huizinga concludes that "Hellenic society was so profoundly imbued with the play-spirit that this spirit never struck the Greeks as a special thing on its own and one of the reasons might well be found in the transformation into another ego that the actor incarnated as his own."²

Huizinga's paean to play may seem a surprising opening for an essay that promises to put into conversation natural selection with the comedic in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.³ Much obviously continues to be written about the work, especially around questions of aesthetics, the Victorian imaginary and metaphor, and lesser still about a potential comic critique.⁴ Such a lacuna has led unfortunately to the adopting of the same interpretative frame that would size up Darwin's relation to aesthetics broadly to the time in which he was writing, limiting the significance of the work for a "historical ontology of ourselves."⁵ In the following pages I sketch another approach, which employs a biopolitical frame in order to read backward and forward: backward to wonder about the biopolitical stakes of Darwin's thinking of variability and natural selection and forward to bring his perspective to bear on how we might respond to the biopolitical wagering that marks so much of "the historical ontology of ourselves" today. My sense is that Darwin can provide if not strategic answers then a useful context to think about what it means to live at the onset of the earth's sixth mass extinction.⁶ In other words, when contemporary ontologies point to biopolitical catastrophe, what kinds of aesthetic and political strategies does a biopolitical reading of Darwin make available? I am hoping too that in some small way a window may also be opened on a corner of nineteenth-century systems of life.⁷

"Elaborately Constructed Forms"

The famous concluding paragraph of *On the Origin of Species* provides us with our starting point. Here Darwin encapsulates the argument of the preceding four hundred pages:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and

from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.⁸

David Kohn, one of most perspicacious readers of Darwin, devotes a number of beautiful pages to explicating the passage, focusing on the power of the sublime, its rhyming with a Victorian notion of progress as well as a Wordsworthian Romantic sensibility.⁹ Kohn traces the image of the bank to Darwin's *Beagle* diaries and to those instances in which Darwin describes other embankments as well. Kohn's conclusion is not just that Darwin had a thing for embankments, but that he did so thanks to the aesthetic category of the sublime.¹⁰

As helpful as Kohn's gloss is, I believe something else is going on in the passage, and it has to do with how quickly Darwin shifts from contemplating what he sees on the "entangled bank" to a conclusion about the aesthetic status of what he sees, by which the bank multiplies into "elaborately constructed forms," which though different, or because they are different, depend on each other for their elaboration into more advanced forms. This happens thanks to what Darwin calls "divergence."¹¹ The interrelation of dependence and difference moves us firmly into the realm of the preceding pages of *The Origin of Species* and in particular to the importance of competition for how such forms are elaborated. I will return to competition shortly as it informs a comic reading of the book, but at this juncture, I would simply note that difference and divergence are what allow Darwin to create a bridge between the bank and its forms of life.

So too laws. Darwin introduces a list of laws acting on the bank, and if we have read *Origin* carefully, we know their order and meaning: the variability of members of a species; the increase of that species in a given area; the vertical and horizontal superimposition of species; the struggle among who or what lives, which then results in natural selection; and lastly the char-

acter of a species that diverges followed by the extinction of those “less-improved.” These inexorable laws are those that lead back to Darwin’s earlier reflection on the “exalted object,” namely the production of higher animals.

If we were to extract a plot by which beautiful forms of life emerge, it might be, to follow up on Huizinga’s insights into play as competition, not so different from the “elaborately constructed forms” dependent and different, produced by these laws. It would be a narrative of the disappearance of less-improved forms, which die off thanks to an odd phrase, what Darwin calls “a divergence of the character of the species,” followed by a few forms or even one form. The narrative is the one often named simply by the adjective Darwinian: forms that can withstand improvement and those that cannot.

Yet another narrative works across *The Origin of Species*, and it is one linked to the phrase “divergence of character.” Darwin had earlier devoted a number of pages to divergence, noting how the extinction of less improved forms induces divergence of character, based on the principle “that lesser differences between varieties will tend to increase into the greater differences between species.”¹² Divergence of character leads to more diversified descendants from any one species in “structure, constitution and habits,” and with that an increased ability emerges “to seize on many and widely diversified places in the polity of nature and so be able to increase in numbers.”¹³ In a word, in the “polity of nature,” divergence of character becomes the motor by which places are not simply inhabited but also taken. A not so subterranean narrative in the passage might be described this way: how diverging characters of species enable attacks on the common in a polity.

“Polity” is a term that Darwin employs occasionally in *The Origin of Species*, and nearly every time he does so, a territory in which the modification of old inhabitants takes place is demarcated. Thus the “polity of each island will have to be filled up with the modification of old inhabitants.”¹⁴ Continuing, he adds:

After the foregoing discussion, which ought to have been much amplified, we may, I think, assume that the modified descendants of any one species will succeed by so much the better as they become more diversified in structure, and are thus enabled to encroach on places occupied by other beings.¹⁵

For Darwin, divergence of character cannot be thought apart from occupying, encroaching, and seizing. There is a sense here as well of the wrongfully

acquired, of trespass, which bears attention. Clearly, in the polity of the island the entangled bank is a site of conflict and encroachment to the degree that it is a site both of property and appropriation.¹⁶

This isn't so surprising. In the paragraph preceding the one quoted above on encroachment, Darwin makes diversification in structure analogous to division of labor:

The advantage of diversification of structure in the inhabitants of the same region is, in fact, the same as that of the physiological division of labour in the organs of the same individual body.¹⁷

Encroachment, seizing, and occupation go hand in hand with division and diversification. And so in addition to the various laws that provide the necessary conditions for the elaboration of life, there is also another law in which appropriation, the making of what I consider to be mine, depends exactly on the descendants modified or diversified in character.

Before taking leave, at least for the moment, of Darwin's bank, let's linger on the last law that appears in the passage, one separated from the other laws that Darwin had observed: the fixed law of gravity. Although the characters of species are busy diverging on the bank, the planet cycles according to a "fixed law." Aside from gravity as another condition for the bank, there is the adjective "fixed," which suggests a different register than growth with reproduction or inheritance and variability. In choosing to juxtapose fixed and unfixed laws, the law of gravity marks an invariability that accounts principally for the cycling of the planet's movement. It is by adopting the perspective of the planet removed from the bank that the force of the laws "acting around us" intensifies. As important as this is, gravity is exiled from the bank precisely to the degree that it does not bear directly on the production of "the most exalted object which we are capable of perceiving, namely, the production of higher animals."¹⁸

Gravity and Competition

Distinguishing the invariability of gravity from the variability of the laws in operation on the bank may make sense in the larger argument of *The Origin of Species*, but there are other frames with which to understand the

law of gravity in the context of the elaboration of life-forms. On this score, recall Merleau-Ponty's gloss of Leibniz and gravity:

Gravity makes for the transcendent which would allow for heavy bodies to enter into competition and to descend. . . . It is the principle of reducing disadvantage: the arrangement of a certain place where forces get stuck, which allows other forces to come into play (singular point). . . . An action that breaks an equilibrium (loss of a part of the body) gives rise to a modification of suspensions that leads to re-establishment of the normal (restoration). The form is fashioned, not by a positive factor, but by a set of vanishing equilibria liberating a set of regulative causalities.¹⁹

The scene that Merleau-Ponty describes is that of a self-contained and internally consistent system of life. The action that takes place resembles a drama of descent, where descent works hand in hand with competition and struggle. Gravity in Merleau-Ponty's perspective is not in fact separate from other laws because it is somehow more fixed than others, but rather the conflict that takes place in evolution depends precisely on actions that break equilibria, which in turn depend on gravity.

Limiting gravity to the movement of the planet allows Darwin to miss asking how disadvantage can be reduced among these life-forms. The struggle for life can in no way be ameliorated through gravity, that is, through an equalizing of forms and laws in which disadvantage is reduced across the bank. But it is thanks to gravity that forces "get stuck" in Merleau-Ponty's description, and thus where other forces begin to be felt. For all of its fixedness, gravity successfully works against the hierarchy of the bank—between those more advanced life-forms and those less advanced. If we want, the law of gravity is precisely what works against the rampant hierarchies that run across *The Origin of Species*. On this note, consider the relation that Merleau-Ponty sets up between forces that are stuck and the appearance of a "singular point." Without the functioning of gravity, the emergence of a singular point is needlessly discounted.²⁰

The stakes of Merleau-Ponty's reading are clear. The emergence of singular points and with them singularities are the products of gravity, and any perspective that would seek to limit gravity to the movement of the planet risks undercutting the emergence of singularities that are not immediately subsumed in the divergence of character. Furthermore, an approach that

refuses to give ground when locating gravity will alter as well how we think about the aesthetics of a system of life and in particular how we conceive of the role of difference in *The Origin of Species*.

One approach would be to see in difference the principal hero of Darwin's work, and that is how Deleuze chooses to read Darwin. Here is the first of a three-part quote:

Darwin's great novelty, perhaps, was that of inaugurating the thought of individual difference. The leitmotiv of *The Origin of Species* is: we do not know what individual difference is capable of! We do not know how far it can go, assuming that we add to it natural selection. Darwin's problem is posed in terms rather similar to Freud on another occasion: it is a question of knowing under what conditions small, unconnected or free-floating differences become appreciable, connected and fixed differences.²¹

Deleuze distinguishes between "free-floating differences" and "fixed differences," where the former seemingly name those differences that are as yet potential and hence invisible, and those that reach a certain threshold so as to become visible and recognized. For Deleuze, individual difference contains both forms of difference and depending on the conditions—how intense natural selection is in a milieu—may show itself capable of quite a lot.

In the second passage, Deleuze confirms the role of natural selection in fixing differences:

Natural selection indeed plays the role of a principle of reality, even of success, and shows how differences become connected to one another and accumulate in a given direction, but also how they tend to diverge further and further in different or even opposed directions. Natural selection plays an essential role: the differentiating of difference (survival of the most divergent).²²

The most divergent in terms of character (structure, Darwin would hasten to add) are those most successful in surviving. Differences in these cases "accumulate" as well as diverge, and it is in the divergence of characters that difference is differentiated, by which I understand Deleuze to mean that only through such a divergence of character is individual difference manifested over time. "Survival of the most divergent" depends on the fixing of difference. Without such a fixing, the divergence of character and with it natural selection would run aground. Thus:

Where selection does not occur or no longer occurs, differences remain or once more become free-floating; where it occurs, it does so to fix the differences and make them diverge. . . . For Darwin, no doubt, individual difference does not yet have a clear status, to the extent that it is considered for itself as a primary matter of selection or differentiation; understood as free-floating or unconnected difference, it is not distinguished from an indeterminate variability.²³

Individual difference does not enjoy a clear status precisely because, on the one hand, natural selection and divergence of character depend on it, while on the other, individual difference constantly risks falling back into the realm of the free-floating. We note too the choice Deleuze sees between selection and indeterminate variability. Difference that remains unconnected and hence impossible to accumulate exists outside the motor of natural selection, outside the motor that stabilizes and names difference as fixed difference.²⁴

Bringing Merleau-Ponty's reading of gravity to bear on the ambivalent status of individual difference localized in Deleuze, we might say that gravity names that which works against the fixing of individual difference, arranging forces in such a way that individual difference cannot be named.²⁵ Divergence of character continually sabotages difference thanks to the deadly work of natural selection. In Deleuze's skeptical reading, it is all about recognizing what happens when selection does not occur—individual difference is preserved for a time—a scenario that would then justify a holding off of selection.

Difference as Comedy

Deleuze's perspective puts us firmly on the track of the comical in Darwin's understanding of difference and variation. How? What would an investigation into the comic stakes of *The Origin of Species* show? If competition among forms of life characterizes the system of life Darwin puts forward here, then why choose to call it a comedy? Deleuze comes close to inviting us to do just that, noting that the great novelty of Darwin was that "we do not know what individual difference is capable of, we do not know how far it can go."²⁶ Reading *The Origin of Species* as emplotting narratively the power of individual difference to stick a finger in the eye of natural selection—that

approach attunes us to the affirmative potential of difference in opposition to the repetition that characterizes selection. Enter University of Berlin philosophy chair, G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel had no theory of his own concerning the origin of species, though he did dedicate a few pages to it in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, for example, he stated:

Within the universal fluid medium, life in its motionless elaboration of itself into various shapes becomes the movement of those shapes, that is, life becomes life as a process. . . . As such, it is life as living things. . . . The simple substance of life is thus the estrangement of itself into shapes and is at the same time the dissolution of these durably existing distinctions. The dissolution of this estrangement is to the same extent itself an estrangement, that is, a division of itself into groupings.²⁷

As Terry Pinkard notes, Hegel's own views "were influenced by those advanced by his French contemporary, Georges Cuvier, who argued that each organism is an internally structured whole that exists in such a close harmony with its environment that changing any small part of it would damage its ability to survive in that environment."²⁸ All of which is to say that no direct affinity between Hegel and Darwin immediately jumps out.

But if we take up *Lectures on Aesthetics*, appropriating Hegel's perspective on the comical in opposition to the tragic, we get a much closer mapping of the comedy of individual difference in Darwin's earlier thought. Where in tragedy the "eternal substance of things emerges victorious" because it strips away only the false one-sidedness from the individuals in conflict, in comedy, it is subjectivity, or personality, which, according to Hegel, "in its infinite assurance retains the upper hand." Continuing, he observes:

In tragedy the individuals destroy themselves through the one-sidedness of their otherwise solid will and character, or they must resignedly accept what they had opposed even in a serious way. In comedy there comes before our contemplation, in the laughter in which the characters dissolve everything, including themselves, the victory of their own subjective personality which nevertheless persists self-assured. The general ground for comedy is therefore a world in which man as subject or person has made himself completely master of everything that counts to him otherwise as the essence of what he wills and accomplishes, a world whose aims are therefore self-destructive because they are unsubstantial.²⁹

Note the emphasis on destruction in Hegel's reading of tragedy, which, though not stated here, recalls those other pages on tragedy in which *hubris* will figure,³⁰ where one-sidedness is another name for *hubris*. Opposition has little meaning in such a context of the tragic. Comedy, for its part, invites contemplation most of all, thanks to the medium of laughter. Rather than destruction, we speak of dissolution as comedy moves front and center, guaranteeing in turn the self-assuredness that comes to characterize the subject of comedy. We note as well that comedy operates in a place of mastery, where man has made himself master of all. Such a position cannot last, however, since the aims of mastery not only differ from but are unrelated to the real. Hence the unshakable disjunction between reality and human mastery that characterizes Hegel's perspective on the comic.

Indeed, Hegel insisted across his lectures on the notion of mastery in relation to comedy. He defined the principle of comedy as consisting of a genre "in which the mastery of all relations and ends is given as much to the individual in his willing and action, as to external contingency."³¹ "The true content of the tragic action," however, is provided, "so far as concerns the aims adopted by the tragic characters, by the range of the substantive and independently justified powers that influence human will."³² The difference between comedy and tragedy for Hegel will be found in the greater importance that he awards the external in tragedy and its power to void the "aims" of the tragic characters. For comedy, that the emphasis falls on relations and ends is worth noting, because with comedy mastery is given both to the individual and to accident. And so when Hegel writes that "by the close of day, man has erected a building from his own inner Sun; and when in the evening he contemplates this, he esteems it more highly than the original external Sun. For now he stands in a conscious relation to his Spirit, and therefore a free relation," he implicitly gestures to the comedic features of the "great Day's work of Spirit"³³ and with it to the inevitable power of the accidental.

"Free relation" is key. Recall that on the bank the law of gravity was precisely the law that remained outside. There are those effects of gravity linked to the milieu of the bank—things descend—and those effects of the other laws that are linked to the notion of variability or natural selection. For Hegel, gravity was seen as the essence of all matter:

As the essence of Matter is gravity, so, on the other hand, we may affirm that the substance, the essence of Spirit is Freedom. . . . Matter possesses gravity in virtue of its tendency toward a central point. It is essentially composite; consisting of parts that exclude each other. It seeks its Unity; and therefore exhibits itself as self-destructive, as verging toward its opposite (an invisible point). If it could attain this, it would be Matter no longer, it would have perished.³⁴

What does Hegel's understanding of gravity suggest for a reading of Darwin's *bank*? First, let's note that the chief attribute of living matter—since this is a matter that “would have perished”—is gravity because matter tends toward a central point. Second, living matter is composite to the degree that it excludes other parts in its seeking of unity. And third, to arrive ultimately at unity is to perish, which suggests in turn that the nonexclusion of parts depends on the continual diminishment of gravity, leading to noncomposition or unity.

Comedy names this seeking of unity, but more than that comedy names the failure of matter to give up gravity, to lose its composite state. Comedy depends on gravity; indeed we note the different forms of comedy—slapstick, the pratfall, stand-up—and how each is premised on the impossibility of a body to avoid gravity. Bodies fall, they move to their horizontal position, and they do so suddenly. As B. H. Fussell remarks:

In comedy, gravity is the given; all bodies are earthbound. Any attempt of man to erect himself from his natural position in the mud or from his natural condition as “thinking mud” makes him an upstart, a fellow who—literally—puts on airs.³⁵

A condition for comedy is gravity, which to be clear does not mean that attempts to hold oneself up vertically are impossible, but only that such attempts will end often in falls, splits, and ultimately a final horizontal resting position.³⁶ Equally, there is no gravity or comedy without both horizontal and vertical movement, what Hegel in typical fashion sees as including what “verges towards its opposite.” In this case it is not the unity of standing upright, but the fall, and here Deleuze would add into difference, that counts. Comedy names the working of gravity to keep living matter composite and hence to continue to respect difference. Note, however, that such a reading sees ex-

clusion as implicit in the makeup of composite matter. Said differently, difference in composite matter depends on parts, which by excluding one another, make room for them.

Here finally will be found one of the contradictions in operation on the entangled bank with its various laws in operation: a problem that our reading of gravity makes clear. In Darwin's account gravity is intended to limit the scene to selection, when in fact it is also thanks to gravity that difference emerges among the forms of life there. In order for matter to remain composite on Darwin's bank, gravity is required, but it is precisely not enough gravity that is the issue. In order for higher forms of life to evolve, gravity must necessarily be less a factor than it is elsewhere, say when the planet cycles. With more gravity the natural position of these life-forms would remain horizontal, which is another way of saying that their composite nature would remain as such.

It is precisely the lack of comedy and the lack of gravity that is a necessary condition for higher forms of life to emerge. Since gravity cannot be increased on the bank, the only alternative is to wait until sufficient time has passed so that higher forms are literally brought low again. Comedy names this waiting and the failed attempts to increase gravity and thus to heighten difference. Yes, comedy acknowledges the possibility of exhibiting self-destruction, and yes, it excludes nothing, which is to say that all movement to unity will come to naught. Another name for such a policy of non-exclusion is the nonhierarchical, the paratactical, and with it the arranging of parts that fails to move to unity or fate.³⁷

Stand and Deliver

And so rather than asking where we stand in terms of a historical ontology of ourselves, might it make more sense to ask *how* we stand? A first step might be to admit that the system of life Darwin describes in *The Origin of Species* does not simply depend on laws of variability, but also requires a milieu in which gravity is at work. This minimizing of the role of gravity in the milieu of the bank is also what makes possible the evolution to higher organisms, that is the "one general law leading to the advancement of all organic

beings,—namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.”³⁸ Diminishing the role of gravity on the bank makes it more difficult to determine who or what is acting and who or what is creating movement there. To the degree, then, that under gravity, forms of life tend to find their center as well as attain their opposite, Darwin, by limiting gravity to the planetary, is proposing an anti-idealistic reading of the bank meant to discount “the striving” of life toward higher forms. Any other choice would have meant emphasizing agency on the bank, which is to say finding the origins of evolution and divergence of character in the organism itself. This suggests that for variability to function agency must be cast out of the garden, and in its place a more material understanding of the milieu of the bank must be highlighted and with it “the general law leading to the advancement of all organic beings.”³⁹

Second, the diminished role of agency suggests something else about how we want to consider the drama underpinning *The Origin of Species*. Recall Northrop Frye’s perspective on the Greek New Comedy:

In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play’s society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery, *anagnorisis* or *cognitio*.⁴⁰

Here Deleuze’s difference comes to the fore as the hero of *The Origin of Species*, and as I have indicated there is much to agree with in such an assessment. Yet on my read we find a calcification around difference, and here I would add that there can only be so much “free-floating difference” given the continued role of gravity on the bank; that in order for difference to continue to be the hero (or for the hero not to be killed or for this not to be a tragedy of selection and divergence of character), the continued role of gravity on the bank must be preserved. For difference to work, for there to be a comedy of bios, not of forms based solely on division of labor, appropriation, and the inevitable move to grasping, gravity is needed. The question, as impossibly metaphorical as may appear, is how to intervene in the course of nature so that gravity might exert more of its force.

Here we come full circle to Merleau-Ponty's attempt in the later part of his life to ask chiasmatically after the relation between the visible and the invisible. If a fall unmasks the invisible, then comedy enjoys a relation to the presence of the invisible on the bank. In order for difference to remain as the potential hero, natural selection and divergence of character need to be made to drift. We speak often today about human evolution and the anthropocene's attempts to alter in radical and quick fashion human evolution through genetic alteration. These attempts fail, however, to reinforce free-floating difference to the degree that they precisely limit difference under cover of difference. In a Deleuzian lexicon, they are less free-floating than they are fixed differences.

Here the comic offers a rejoinder by unmasking the lack of gravity on the bank and in turn seeking to introduce a pratfall. This would be the Darwinian equivalent of a comic sensibility of advanced life-forms putting on airs, while we wait for the other shoe to drop. And in 2018 that potential for a pratfall will be found in the mastery of the anthropocene to make a mess of it: that today we are witnessing the biggest pratfall of them all and with it the extinction of life on impossible scale. If we listen carefully, we may begin to hear the rueful laugh that comes when mastery has been pushed past its limit. Gravity returns in contemporary biopolitical catastrophe, and although we may choose to read it as a tragedy, it seems to have all the makings of a comedy.

In an analysis of the Darwinian system of life that is divergence of character, a comic reading points us in the direction of such a comedy with its effects on Foucault's historical ontology of ourselves. It is a comedy in which the gravity of the planet reappears at precisely the moment when the taking of places and spaces by the anthropocene has reached its limit. We may choose not to speak of climate change as a comedy, but when read against divergence of character, it shows us the ultimately failed attempts to place Darwin's laws on the same scale as gravity. One of the reasons that the final scene of Darwin's bank has been so seductive is, I would argue and conclude, less because of the pastoral and sublime elements so many have read there and more because of the impression of something magical at work—a bank that seduces precisely because of the magic of gravity's absence. A reading attuned to the missing comic potential of the bank would be the one that

knows how to want that which has happened, to want it serenely. This is comedy's and gravity's hard lesson.

NOTES

1. John Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1944), 145.
2. *Ibid.*, 144.
3. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species; or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London, 1859).
4. See, for example, the following: Robert M. Young, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Debra Journet, "Metaphor, Ambiguity, and Motive in Evolutionary Biology: W. D. Hamilton and the 'Gene's Point of View,'" *Written Communication* 22, no. 4 (2005): 379–420; and Evelyn Fox Keller, *Making Sense of Life: Explaining Biological Development with Models, Metaphors, and Machines* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
5. Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" <http://foucault.info/documents/whatisenlightenment/foucault.whatisenlightenment.en.html> (accessed June 10, 2014). For a helpful overview of the term, see Santiago Zabala's *The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology after Metaphysics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 9–10.
6. Nicholas Matzke, Susumu Tomiya, et al., "Has the Earth's Sixth Mass Extinction Already Arrived?" *Nature*, March 3, 2011, 51–57.
7. Carolyn Miller and S. Michael Halloran, "Reading Darwin, Reading Nature; or, On the Ethos of Historical Science," in *Understanding Scientific Prose*, ed. Jack Selzer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 106–26.
8. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 491.
9. See David Kohn and Thomas F. Glick's map of Darwin's thought in *On Evolution: The Development of the Theory of Natural Selection* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996). Darwin's relation to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economy has been the focus of a number of recent treatments. Of particular interest is Daniel Bovina and Marlene Tromp's edited collection, *Culture and Money in the Nineteenth Century: Abstracting Economics* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), especially for their critique of Robert H. Frank's reading of competition, perfect or otherwise, featured in his *The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). See too Momme von Sydow's particularly helpful gloss of Darwin's debt to both Malthus and Smith in *From Darwinian Metaphysics towards Understanding the Evolution of Evolutionary Mechanisms: A*

Historical and Philosophical Analysis of Gene-Darwinism and Universal Darwinism (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2012), 174–76. Patrick Brantlinger's *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013) also lays out in grim detail the commonalities running among Darwin and his forebears.

10. See as well Barbara Larson, “Darwin, Burke, and the Biological Sublime,” in *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History*, ed. Barbara Larson and Sabine Flach (London: Ashgate, 2013), 17–36.

11. On this note, see David Kohn, “Darwin’s Keystone: The Principle of Divergence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Origin of Species*, ed. Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 87–108.

12. Darwin, *Origin*, 57.

13. *Ibid.*, 112.

14. *Ibid.*, 104.

15. *Ibid.*, 116.

16. “It may at first sight seem odd that intelligence evolved in a social context could be applied to a non-social one. To this day, however, we readily appreciate analogies between the control of society and of material objects, a fact which is deeply embedded in our language. . . . I notice that earlier in this paragraph I used the word ‘manipulate’ to describe the use of one individual to control the behavior of another; the root of the word in the latin manus, or hand” (John Maynard Smith, *The Theory of Evolution* [London: Penguin, 1975], 323).

17. Darwin, *Origin*, 115.

18. An astute reader of Darwin’s works may well point to those passages where the author details his passion for birds and flight, which would seem to challenge the lack of relation between gravity and the “production of higher animals.” The objection would not only include birds but certain insects as well since flight would presumably mean that gravity plays a larger role in their development than with animals who primarily walk on land. To be clear, to say that Darwin exiles gravity is not to argue that birds are not higher animals or to deny that flying entails flopping to the ground. Rather, if our focus remains on how higher animals are produced, laws other than gravity lead to divergence. Gravity cannot save them from the law of divergence.

19. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, trans. Roberto Vallier (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 236.

20. Veronique M. Foti speaks of an “aesthetics of gravity” informing all of Merleau-Ponty’s work, including that of flesh. See her wonderful *Vision’s Invisibles: Philosophical Explorations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 77–80.

21. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 248.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Roberto Esposito's perspective on difference in *Categories of the Impolitical* is helpful in this regard. Speaking of systems of life and difference, he notes that "it is as if the binary pair unleashes a force of difference that strives to realize each of the opposing terms and everything it contains in its purest form. In fact this system's productivity increases in line with the relative clarity, distinction, decisiveness and oppositional nature of its terms. But it is precisely this differential force, and the maximal productivity that it gives the system, that simultaneously pushes it into crisis. . . . It is the system that placates, heals, and saves, restoring balance and relation" (Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley [New York: Fordham University Press, 2015], 32).

25. Compare Canguilhem's reading of variation which bends where Deleuze's straightens: "In any case, for Darwin, to live is to submit an individual difference to the judgment of an ensemble of living beings. This judgment has only two possible outcomes: either death or becoming oneself part of the jury for a while. So long as one lives, one is always judge and judged." Georges Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life*, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 105.

26. Consider too the relation of humor to repetition in Deleuze's thought. "Repetition belongs to humour and irony; it is by nature transgression or exception, always revealing a singularity opposed to the particulars subsumed under laws, a universal opposed to the generalities which give rise to laws" (Deleuze, *Difference*, 5).

27. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Digireads, 2010), 85.

28. "Although Hegel accepted the fact that the earth had a rather violent history of several million years, that there was once a time when there was no life on earth, and that many species of plant and animal life had become extinct, he also believed that empirical biology and comparative anatomy . . . had ruled out evolution as a satisfactory answer of the origin of different species." In Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.

29. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, The Oxford Translations, electronic edition (Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex, 2000).

30. Ibid., 1195.

31. Ibid., 1194.

32. Ibid.

33. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (New York: American Home Library 1902), 163.
34. Ibid., 61.
35. B. H. Fussell, "A Pratfall Can Be a Beautiful Thing," in *Comedy: New Perspectives*, ed. Maurice Charney (New York: Literary Forum, 1978), 245.
36. See Adriana Cavarero's recent musing on inclination, especially her gloss of love and the center of gravity. Her conclusion? "Inclination folds the I and dispossesses it." Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinazioni: Critica della rettitudine* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2013), 16.
37. The question is not so different from the one Michel Foucault asked about "the paradox of the relations of capacity and power. Now the relations between the growth of capabilities and the growth of autonomy are not as simple as the eighteenth century may have believed. And we have been able to see what forms of power relation were conveyed by various technologies (whether we are speaking of productions with economic aims, or institutions whose goal is social regulation, or of techniques of communication): disciplines, both collective and individual, procedures of normalization exercised in the name of the power of the state, demands of society or of population zones, are examples. What is at stake, then, is this: How can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?"
38. Darwin, *Origin*, 247.
39. "At one time or another, by some operation of force which still completely battles conjecture, the properties of life were awakened in lifeless matter. Perhaps the process was a prototype resembling that other one which later in a certain stratum of living matter gave rise to consciousness. The tension then aroused in the previously inanimate matter strove to attain an equilibrium; the first instinct was present, that to return to lifelessness. The living substance at that time had death within easy reach." Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922), 47.
40. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (London: Penguin, 2002), 163.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume has been derived from a conference at the Huntington Library titled “Systems of Life: Economics, Politics, and the Biological Sciences, 1750–1850,” which took place November 9–10, 2012. The volume coeditors thank the Huntington, as well as the original contributors, who inspired the project of gathering these essays for publication.

The cover image, titled “Natural History of Birds,” appears by courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. A part of the Burndy Library Collection, it is the frontispiece of volume 4 of Carl von Linné et al., *A Genuine and Universal System of Natural History* (1794–1807?).

The illustration “The Orang-Outang Carrying Off a Negro Girl” appears by courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. A part of the Burndy Library Collection, it is the frontispiece of volume 2 of Carl von Linné et al., *A Genuine and Universal System of Natural History* (1794–1807?).

An expanded version of Amanda Jo Goldstein’s “William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny” appeared as Chapter 1, “Blake’s Mundane Egg: Epigenesis and Milieux,” in *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life*. Copyright © 2017 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD A. BARNEY is an associate professor of English at the University at Albany, SUNY. He is the author of *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford University Press, 1999) and has edited several volumes, including *Rhetorics of Plague, Early and Late* for the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* (Winter 2010–11). He is currently at work on a book about the biopolitics of the sublime in eighteenth-century Britain.

TIMOTHY C. CAMPBELL is a professor of Italian at Cornell University. His most recent book is *The Technē of Giving: Cinema and the Generous Form of Life* (Fordham, 2017). He also edits the series Commonalities for Fordham.

MRINALINI CHAKRAVORTY, an associate professor of English at the University of Virginia, is the author of *In Stereotype: South Asia in the Global Literary Imaginary* (Columbia University Press, 2014), as well as articles on transnationalism, film, Arab women writers, dystopias as a genre, and contemporary global fiction that have appeared in *PMLA*, *MFS*, *differences*, and other journals and collections. She is at work on a book on representations of global hunger.

JAMES EDWARD FORD III teaches English at Occidental College in Los Angeles. He writes on African American literature, political theory, and contemporary popular culture. His articles are published or forthcoming in *Novel*, *Biography*, and *Cultural Critique*. His first book, *Thinking through*

Crisis: Depression Era Black Literature, Theory, and Politics, is forthcoming from Fordham University Press.

AMANDA JO GOLDSTEIN is an assistant professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

PIERRE MACHEREY is a professor emeritus of philosophy at L'Université de Lille III, France. He was a student of Louis Althusser and a coauthor of *Reading Capital* (1965). His other works include *A Theory of Literary Production*, *The Object of Literature*, and *Hegel or Spinoza*.

ANNIKA MANN is an assistant professor of English at the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University. Her primary fields of research are eighteenth-century and Romantic British literature, with special interest in the history of medicine. She has been published in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* and is a coeditor of *Transforming Contagion: Risky Contacts among Bodies, Disciplines, and Nations* (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

CHRISTIAN MAROUBY is a professor of French and Francophone studies at Mills College. He holds an MA from Université Paris 7 and a PhD from UC Berkeley. His scholarly interests were first focused on early anthropology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and have gradually become concerned with economic theory, still with an anthropological focus. He is the author of two books at Éditions du Seuil, *Utopie et primitivisme* (1990) and *L'économie de la nature* (2004), and a number of articles and book chapters.

WARREN MONTAG is the Brown Family Professor of Literature at Occidental College in Los Angeles. His most recent books include *Althusser and His Contemporaries* (Duke University Press, 2013) and *The Other Adam Smith* (Stanford University Press, 2014). He is also the editor of *Décaloges*, a journal on Althusser and his circle, and the translator of Etienne Balibar's *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness* (Verso, 2013).

CATHERINE PACKHAM is a senior lecturer in English and Head of English Literature at the University of Sussex, UK. She is the author of *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and a coeditor of *Political Economy, Literature, and the Formation of Knowledge, 1720–1850* (Routledge, 2018).

JOSEPH SERRANO is a graduate student in the English Department at University of California, Berkeley.

INDEX

- Abedin, Zainul, 214–15, 217–20, 222, 234nn43,53–54
 aesthetics, 7; Charles Darwin and, 237–48; of hunger, 202–4, 212–15, 221, 225–26, 228, 229nn4,10
 Agamben, Giorgio, 2, 6, 7, 8, 26, 31nn14–15, 32n40, 116–18, 122, 126–27, 129, 131
 agriculture, 2, 9, 39, 42–45, 47–50, 118
 Alexander the Great, 17
 Allard, James, 115, 116, 131n4, 132n9
 Allen, Robert C., 231n20
 Ambirajan, S., 210, 232n27
 Aquinas, Thomas, 18
 Aristotle, 18, 65, 79n26
 artificial systems, 22–23, 26; interference of, in the market, 22, 43, 208
 Ash, Gobardhan, 234n43
 Atkinson, William, 131n5
 Augustine, Saint, 117
 Avital, Eytan, 188, 199n102, 200n110

 Baij, Ramkinkar, 234n43
 Bain, Alexander, 211
 Baker, Thomas, 3, 30n5
 Barbauld, Anna, 27–28, 135–39, 141–42, 152–53, 157, 159nn1–2
 Barrier, Weismann, 186
 Bassard, Katherine C., 60, 78n14
 Bassino, Jean-Pascal, 231n20
 Beddoes, Thomas, 9
 Beer, Gillian, 250n4

 Benjamin, Walter, 24–25, 56–58, 62–63, 67–68, 71, 74–75, 79nn21–22, 80nn32–33,42, 81nn47–48,53
 Bentham, Jeremy, 105
 Bergson, Henri, 173
 Bhattacharya, Chittaprosad, 214, 219, 221, 234n43,51, 235n57
 Bichat, Xavier, 10, 173, 178, 196n63
 Bindman, Geoffrey, 130n2
 bioeconomics, 96–97
biologie, 178, 196n68
 biopolitics, 2, 4–8, 13, 29, 31n16, 116–18, 121, 123, 130, 237; gravity and, 24, 249; hunger and, 210, 212, 226; self-organization and, 192n9; biopolitical susceptibility, 126
 biopower, 5, 43–44, 96, 116
 Black Arts Movement, 59
 black maternity, 58; (non)reproductivity and, 61–62; nonreproductivity, slavery and, 70; reproductivity, writing and, 71
 black womanhood: and (non)reproductivity, 61
 Blackmore, Richard, 167–68, 193n20
 Blake, William, 3, 10, 137
 Blanchot, Maurice, 80n40, 81n52
 Bloch, Marcus, 9
 bloodletting, 39–40
 Blum, Carol, 51n2, 205, 230n13
 Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich, 10, 167
 Bonnet, Charles, 167
 Bourdieu, Pierre, 171, 194n30

- Bovina, Daniel, 250n9
 Brantlinger, Patrick, 250–51n9
 Brennan, Lance, 210, 232n27
 Brooks, Joanna, 58, 78n3
 Brown, Vivian, 50, 54n32, 55n47
 Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de, 9, 167–68, 183, 193n24
 Burdach, Karl Friedrich, 9, 196n68
 Burke, Edmund, 27, 117, 121–22, 131n5, 132n15, 139–41, 146, 148, 150, 160n11
 Burrow, John, 112–13n43
- Caldwell, John, 210, 232nn27–28
 Camporesi, Piero, 203, 229n6
 Canguilhem, Georges, 180–81, 191n8, 197nn74, 78–80, 252n25
 Carby, Hazel, 61
 Carr, Frances, 159n1
 Carretta, Vincent, 60, 78n14
 Cavarero, Adriana, 253n36
 cell theory, modern, 10
 Césaire, Aimé, 56, 67
 charity, 21, 203–4, 206–8, 212, 222
 Chatterjee, Partha, 218, 234n56
 Chaudhary, Zahid, 215–16, 233nn37, 41, 234nn44, 46
 Chaudhuri, Supriya, 202, 228n3, 233n42, 234n43
 Cheng, Anne Anlin, 61
 Cheselden, William, 8, 31n18
 Cheyne, George, 8, 31n19
 Chua, Christina, 235n68
 circulation, 2, 5, 24, 29, 40–42, 52; of texts, 139–40, 142
 Claeys, Gregory, 119, 131nn5, 8
 Clark, William, 5, 30n9
 Cocks, John Somers, 131n5
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 115, 172–73, 195n43
 Collini, Stefan, 112–13n43
 competition: in Darwin, Charles, 29, 238–41, 243, 250n9; in Greek drama, 236
 configuration, 177, 182, 185, 195n61
 contagion, 117, 121
- Copernicus, 3, 15
 Corresponding Society, 114
 Crick, Francis, 186
croissance, 37
 Cudworth, Ralph, 15, 32n30
 Cullen, William, 99, 111nn15, 17
 Cumberland, Richard, 16, 32n32
 Cunningham, Andrew, 111n16, 190n6
 Currey, Bruce, 232n27
 Cuvier, Georges, 179, 191n7, 196n62, 244
- Darwin, Charles, 3, 13, 29, 186, 190n5, 204, 210–12, 217, 224–25, 233n37, 237–44, 246–49, 250nn3, 9, 251n18, 252n25
 Darwin, Erasmus, 28, 139, 165, 177–81, 188, 195n61, 196n70
 Dasgupta, Partha, 224
 David, Jacques-Louis, 72
 Davis, Mike, 203, 223, 229n7, 233n41, 235nn61–62
 Davy, Humphry, 10
 Dawkins, Richard, 187, 199n99
 de Bolla, Peter, 100, 111nn21, 25, 133n24
 de Troy, Jean-François, 72
 Deleuze, Gilles, 29, 123, 133n20, 242–43, 246, 248, 252nn21, 25–26
 Derathé, Robert, 89, 92n17
 Desai, Meghnad, 224, 235n63
 Descartes, René, 17–18
 developmental systems theory (DST), 188, 199
 diaspora, 59
 Diderot, Denis, 9
 Digby, William, 233n41
 divergence, 238–39, 241–43, 248–49, 251n11
 Dovell, Karen Lerner, 69, 80n37
 Drèze, Jean, 224, 235n63
 du Pont de Nemours, Pierre Samuel, 38
 Duane, William, 9, 31n21
 Duchan, Judith Felson, 131n2
- Earl of Dartmouth, 71
 economic development, 38, 206

- economics: growth in, 24, 35–37, 42–45, 47–48, 51, 54n41, 109, 113n43; as part of biopolitical analysis, 2–8; negative growth in, 37
- élan*, 88; *élan vital*, 82, 192n9
- Eliot, T. S., 69
- Ellman, Maud, 203, 229n10,
- embryos, 27, 163, 167–68, 170, 172–73, 177, 183, 185; “little embryo,” 170–71, 194n39
- Engels, Friedrich, 223, 235n59
- Engelstein, Stefanie, 189n1, 192n13, 193n27, 198nn87,94
- Enlightenment, 2, 5–6, 39, 56, 79–80n30, 102–3, 107, 109, 117, 121; black radical thought and, 59; hunger and, 203; Scottish Enlightenment, 94–95, 231n19; subject of, 71
- entangled banks, 29, 237–38, 240, 247
- entitlements, 224–25
- epigenesis, 27, 28, 139, 164–66, 177, 181, 185, 188–89, 197nn76–77; in Blake, 166–68, 170–75; developmental systems theory and, 188; epigenetics and, 186, 198n95; preformationism and, 154, 164;
- epigenetics, 187, 198n95
- Equiano, Olaudah, 72
- Erdman, David, 142, 160n16, 160–61n18, 192n14
- Esposito, Roberto, 2, 6–8, 11, 31nn13,16, 32n24, 116, 121, 123–24, 132n16, 133nn19–21, 252n24
- eugenics, 210
- Fairclough, Mary, 133n24
- Falvo, Rosa Maria, 234n53
- famine, 29, 203, 209–10, 213, 215–24, 229nn5,7,12; Bengal Famine (1874), 210; Bengal Famine (1943), 214, 217, 219, 221, 233n42, 234n43; “feminization of famine,” 218; Madras Famine (1878), 210; Orissa Famine (1866), 210
- Feng, Wang, 232n20
- Ferguson, Adam, 8, 31n17
- Ferguson, Frances, 138, 160n6
- Flach, Sabine, 251n10
- Foti, Veronique M., 251n20
- Foucault, Michel, 2, 5–7, 31nn12,14–15, 37, 40, 51n3, 96, 116–17, 126–27, 133nn25–27, 191n7, 249, 250n5, 253n37
- Frank, Robert H., 250n9
- French, R. K., 111n16
- Freud, Sigmund, 81n50, 242, 253n39
- Frye, Northrop, 248, 253n40
- Fussell, B. H., 246, 253n35
- Galileo, 15
- Gallagher, Catherine, 51n2, 96–97, 104, 110n10, 112nn34–35, 113n45, 138, 159n5, 205, 230n13
- Gassendi, Pierre, 18
- Gates, Henry Louis, 57
- Gibbon, Edward, 50
- Gigante, Denise, 160n7, 172, 190n6, 192n13, 194nn31,38, 195n48
- Gilbert, Geoffrey, 205, 229n13, 230n14, 231n19
- Gilpin, William, 133n24
- Glick, Thomas F., 250n9
- Gmelin, Johann Friedrich, 9
- Goldschmidt, Victor, 84
- Goldstein, Amanda Jo, 139, 160n10
- Golinski, Jan, 5, 30n9
- Gottlieb, Gilbert, 188, 199n106
- Guillory, John, 102, 105, 112nn28,36
- Gupta, Subodh, 226–28, 235n68
- Hairston, Eric Ashton, 68, 80nn35,39
- Hale, Matthew, 3, 30n4
- Halloran, S. Michael, 250n7
- Hamilton, Paul, 190–91n6
- Hamilton, W. D., 250n4
- Hampsher-Monk, Iain, 131n8
- Haraway, Donna, 123, 133n20
- Hardy, Thomas, 115
- Hartley, David, 104, 190n1
- Harvey, William, 28, 40, 162, 164, 166–67, 183, 189–90nn1–4, 193n18, 197n76

- Hasnat, Abul, 234n53
 Hayden, Robert, 60, 78n13
 Hegel, G. W. F., 29, 244–46, 252nn27–29, 253n33
 Henderson, Andrea, 136, 159n3
 Henry, Thomas, 168–69, 193n22
 Hill, Mike, 112n30
 Hirst, Damien, 226
 Hobbes, Thomas, 14–18, 22–23, 32nn25–29, 40, 52n13, 83, 84
 Holmes, Richard, 160n7
 Holocaust, the 203
 holocausts, 203, 229n7
 homology: functional, 24; structural, 6, 24
 Hont, Istvan, 54n35, 205, 229n13
 Hooper, Willoughby Wallace, 213, 215–18, 220, 222, 234n46
 hubris, 64, 73, 24; as one-sidedness, 244–45
 Hugo, Graeme, 232n27
 Huizinga, John, 236–37, 239, 250n1
 Human Genome Project, 187
 human nature, 18, 22–23, 46, 100, 105, 107–8
 Hume, David, 88, 99, 103–5, 112nn33,37
 Hunger, 28, 29, 201–29, 229nn4,10, 230n15, 231n18, 232nn25,26, 233nn31,37, 235n65; globalization and, 28, 203, 223
 Hunter, John, 98, 115, 119, 132n9, 163, 181, 189n1
 Ignatieff, Michael, 205, 230n13
 immunity, 168; to cowpox, 10; human immune system and external agents, 123; immunization, 6, 10, 121, 123, 132n14; immunological system, 10; immunology, 10, 133n20, 187; promotion of public health and, 10–11; property and, 6, 132n16
 inheritance, 71, 148, 165, 188; dis/inheritance, 58; “ecological inheritance,” 188; preformationism and, 186–87
 integuments, 184–85
 invisibility, 20–21, 24, 102–3, 136–37, 142, 152–53, 242, 246, 249; invisible beings, 19, 27, 159n1; invisible wage-laborers, 103; as limit of human knowledge, 17–18; as time of waiting, 136; *See also* invisible hand
 invisible hand, 6, 21, 31n14, 46, 102, 111nn26–27, 122
 Islam, Nazrul, 234n53
 Jablonka, Eva, 188, 199nn102–3, 200n110
 Jackson, Noel, 165
 Jacob, François, 186–87, 198n96
 Jacyna, L. S., 132n12, 164, 190n5
 Jenner, Edward, 10–11, 31n22, 32n23
 Johnson, James Weldon, 60, 78n12
 Johnson, Joseph, 142, 190n1
 Johnson, Nancy E., 130n2
 Johnson, Samuel, 4, 30n6, 94, 110n2
 Jones, Donna, 173, 195n47
 Journet, Debra, 250n4
 Judy, Ronald, 63–64, 79n24
 Kant, Immanuel, 17, 25, 28, 32n35, 56–57, 62–72, 79nn23,25,27,29–31, 81nn49,51, 171, 172, 191n6, 194n32
 Kelleher, Margaret, 218, 234n55
 Keller, Evelyn Fox, 187, 192n10, 194n35, 199n100, 250n4
 Kelsen, Hans, 62–63
 Kendrick, Robert, 61, 79n17
 Knorr, Georg Wolfgang, 9
 Koelb, Clayton, 160n7
 Kohn, David, 238, 250n9, 251n11
 Kraft, Elizabeth, 159n1
 La Fontaine, Jean de, 36
 La Rochefoucauld, François de, 85–86, 88, 90
 Labor, 28, 37, 43–47, 96–97, 100–3, 107; division of, 45–47, 49, 54n41, 97, 100, 170, 231n17, 240, 248
 Lacan, Jacques, 58, 81nn50–51

- laissez-faire, 39, 98; biological and economic thought and, 24, 39–40, 231n17
- Lamarck, Jean-Baptiste, 9–10, 28, 139, 165, 177–80, 179n79, 188, 196–97nn62–70, 197nn73,80, 199n105, 200n110
- Lamb, Marion, 188, 199n102, 200n110
- Larson, Barbara, 251n10
- Leclaire, Serge, 58, 78n5, 79n18
- Lee, James, 232n20
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 21, 241
- Lemonnier, Anicet-Charles-Gabriel, 72
- Lerner, Michel-Pierre, 3, 30n2
- Levaillant, François, 9
- Levi, Primo, 203, 229n8
- Lewontin, Richard, 189, 197n79, 199n104, 200n111
- life, 3, 7, 9, 10, 19, 21–22, 28, 25, 36, 37, 39, 41–43, 45, 58, 60, 67, 74, 76, 84–85, 90, 94, 96–103, 105–6, 108, 119–20, 130, 135–36, 154, 156, 160n7, 164–66, 168, 172–75, 178–89, 191n7, 192n10, 197n76, 199n109, 203, 206–9, 212, 218, 223, 230n16, 237–38, 240–44, 247, 249; afterlife, 111, 230n14; animal life, 98, 119, 171, 178, 252n28; biological life, 3, 8, 50, 171; black life, 58; bodily life, 230n14; collective life, 90, 91; colonized life, 218; disciplinary life, 30n8; economic life, 50; embryonic life, 177; eternal life, 148; everyday life of common people, 118; extinction versus, 237–39, 249; forms of life, 174, 238–39, 243, 247–48; life science, 96, 164–67, 170–72, 179, 182, 184–86, 189n1, 190n5, 192n13, 196n68, 198n95; “nude” life, 31n16; organicist conception of life, 165, 173; plant life, 252n28; Romantic life philosophy, 191n6; vegetable life, 42
- Linné, Carl von, 9, 11–13, 31n20
- Locke, John, 6, 22–23, 132n16
- Lutten Van Zanden, Jan, 231n20
- Luxemburg, Rosa, 223, 235nn59,62
- Ma, Debin, 231n20
- Macherey, Pierre, 22, 25
- Makdisi, Saree, 165, 161n19, 171, 191n9, 194n31, 195n48
- Malthus, Thomas Robert, 27–29, 36, 42, 48–49, 96, 109, 113n43, 138–39, 157, 159n4, 161n22, 204, 208–11, 224–25, 232nn21–26,29–30, 233n31, 250n9
- Mann, Paul, 150, 161n20
- Manzur, Abul, 234n53
- Marouby, Christian, 6–7, 24, 111n13, 206, 231n17
- Marx, Karl, 19, 47, 201–2, 222–24, 226, 228nn1–2, 235n59
- Maternity, 57
- Matzke, Nicholas, 250n6
- Maupertuis, Pierre Louis, 167
- Mbembe, Achille, 80, 222, 235n58
- McCann, Andrew, 131nn2,8
- McCarthy, William, 159n1
- McGann, Jerome, 142, 160n17
- McLane, Maureen, 138, 160nn6,9
- Meek, Ronald, 47, 52nn12,16, 54n34
- Mendelian population genetics, 186
- mercantilism, 6, 102
- Merian, Maria Sibylla, 9
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 29, 241, 243, 249, 251nn19–20
- Mignolo, Walter, 229n5
- Mill, John Stuart, 38, 51n4
- Miller, Carolyn, 250n7
- Mitchell, W. J. T., 156, 161n21, 175, 191n6, 195n56
- Modern Evolutionary Synthesis, 186
- Molière, 39
- Moll-Murata, Christine, 231n20
- Montag, Warren, 62–63, 79n19
- Montaigne, Michel de, 39
- Müller-Sievers, Helmut, 172, 190n6, 194n36
- Murphy, Michael, 130n2

- natural law, 39, 63, 86, 166
 natural selection, 29, 186; the comedic
 and, 237–38, 242–43, 245, 249; hunger
 and, 210
 naturalization, 171, 189
Naturphilosophie, 172
 Needham, John, 167
 Newton, Isaac, 20, 22, 95–96, 110n9
 Niobe, myth of 25, 56–57, 59, 62, 67–77,
 80n39, 81n51

 O’Neale, Sondra, 60
 Occom, Samson, 61
oikonomia, 6, 117–18, 129
 Oncken, Auguste, 39
 Ong, Walter, 3, 30nn3,8
 Ontogeny, 28, 167, 187
 organism, 26, 97, 101, 112n30, 119, 123,
 165, 171–72, 177, 179, 180, 186–88,
 197n79, 231n18, 244, 247–48
 Ovid, 57, 68, 75, 80
 Oyama, Susan, 188, 195n57, 197n79,
 198nn95,97, 199nn107–9

 Packham, Catherine, 47, 54n33, 115–16,
 129, 131n4, 132nn9,11, 194n35, 196n70,
 231n18
 Paine, Thomas, 27, 139–42, 146, 148,
 150, 160n12, 161n19
 Parthasarathi, Prasannan, 231–32n20
 Pascal, Blaise, 16
 Pinkard, Terry, 244, 252n28–29
 pity, 25, 83–91
 plague, 121, 209
 Plato, 3
 polity, 29, 239–40; “polity of nature,” 239
 Polo, Marco, 48
 Polyani, Karl, 223, 235n60
 Pomeranz, Kenneth, 231–32n20
 Poole, Rosey E., 60
 Poor Laws, 210, 230n15, 232n15
 Porset, Charles, 90
 preformationism, 27, 136, 154, 164, 167,
 186, 193n19, 198n95
 Price, Uvedale, 125, 133n24

 print culture, 139–41
 property, 6, 22; the entangled bank and,
 240; immunity and, 6, 132; the
 proprietor of rights and, 62
 providence, 16–17, 23, 129; as the
 “natural course of things,” 50, 93,
 95–96; secularization of, 18–19, 118

 quarantines, 121
 Quesnay, François, 24, 38–45,
 52nn6,8,10,12,14–15, 53nn17,20, 97,
 111n13, 231n17

 Raj, the, 218
 Rehbock, Philip F., 132n12
 Ricardo, David, 48
 Roe, Nicholas, 116, 130n2, 131n3,
 134n29, 160n7
 Roe, Shirley A., 190n4, 191n6, 193n24,
 194n35
 Roger, Jacques, 166, 191n8, 193n17
 Rothschild, Emma, 54n32, 111n27
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 11, 22–23, 25,
 46, 82–91, 92nn1–4,6–16,18–19, 118
 Roy, Parama, 203, 229n11
 Rusnock, Andrea, 5, 30n10
 Ruston, Sharon, 160n7, 197n72

 savages, 206, 209, 212; civilization and,
 25, 210; pity and, 86; “savage nations,”
 207; “savage” want, 207
 Schaffer, Simon, 5, 30n9
 Schomburg, Arthus, 60, 78n11
 Schumpeter, Joseph, 40
 Schwann, Theodor, 10
 Scrivener, Michael, 115–16 130n2, 131n3
 Seba, Albertus, 9
 Secombe, Thomas, 130n1
 self-esteem, 85, 88, 90, 92
 self-generation, 173
 self-interest, 46, 85, 90, 101, 104, 203–4,
 206–10, 212, 217–18, 225, 227, 231n18
 self-love, 83, 84, 85, 90, 92
 self-organization, 28, 171, 177, 181
 self-other coordination, 123

- self-preservation, 83, 84, 101, 211–12
- Selzer, Jack, 250n7
- Sen, Amartya, 224, 233, 235nn63–65
- Shaftesbury, Anthony, Third Earl of, 16
- Sharp, William, 72
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 10
- Shields, John, 60, 68, 78–79n14, 80n36
- Singh, Kishore, 234n52
- Siskin, Clifford, 4, 30nn7–8, 94, 102–3, 109, 110nn5–6, 9, 111nn20–21, 112n31, 113n44, 122, 132n17, 138, 160nn6, 8
- slavery, 25, 57, 59, 73, 79n26
- Smith, Adam, 1, 6, 7, 14, 19, 20–22, 29, 31nn14–15, 32n41, 35, 37–38, 41, 44–45, 46–51, 93, 110nn3, 7–8, 111nn13, 27, 112nn37, 42, 112–13n43, 122–23, 125, 204–8, 210–12, 217, 224–25, 229n12, 230–32nn14–20, 233n37, 250n9; economic growth and, 54–55n41, 55n44; problems in Smith's thought, 46, 53–54n32; Smith's notion of system, 1–2, 19–24, 26, 28, 30n8, 54n36, 94–109
- Smith, John Maynard, 251n16
- somaecconomics, 96, 104, 109
- sovereign/sovereignty, 14, 16, 27, 117–18, 125–29, 133n28; colonial sovereignty, 69, 77, 80n30; and hunger, 204, 226; individual sovereignty and appropriation, 132n16; and “security,” 126; sovereign decline, 126; sovereign power, 23, 126; system and, 14; “Tumult” and, 15
- Spallanzani, Lazzaro, 167
- speech therapy activism, 115, 131n2
- Spinoza, Baruch, 19, 63
- spontaneous order, 22, 24
- spontaneous sentiments, 83–86, 88–90
- stadial theory of history, 50
- state of nature, 22–23, 84, 86, 90–91
- Stewart, Dugald, 93–94, 110nn1, 3
- supernationality, 56, 78n1
- supply and demand, 28–29, 49; multiplicity of, 17; as political management, 2, 4–5, 116–17, 121, 127
- susceptibility, 27, 119, 120–21, 123–26, 132n13, 165, 178–79, 185, 197n77
- Swammerdam, Jan, 167
- Swift, Jonathan, 14, 16–19, 32nn34, 36, 39
- sympathy, 1, 29, 46, 82–83, 88, 112n37, 125, 132n13, 177, 202–4, 211–12, 214–18, 227, 233n37
- syncretism, 69, 71
- system: aesthetics of, 237, 242–43, 247, 249; asystematic systems, 11, 15; as conquest, 17–18; difference and, 252n24; economic systems, 2, 5, 6, 39, 42, 97, 102, 104, 108, 231n17; infancy and maturity and, 36; irregular systems, 15, 23; as management, 2, 4–5, 116–17, 121, 127; natural system, 9, 17–18, 21, 23, 26, 95, 99, 108–9; in Smith, 96–97, 99; systematic assimilation, 9; systematic vitality, 123; systematicity, 1–4, 9–11, 13, 15, 21, 23, 65, 79n28, 96, 102, 123, 132n18, 184; systemic, 21, 27; systemization, 8, 65, 102; as “systems of life,” 37, 39, 241; systems theory, 11, 24n24; totalization and, 18, 129; translation of, 14; *See also* developmental systems theory
- system of natural liberty, 21–22; the market and, 22–23
- Tauber, Allen, 123
- Thelwall, John, 10, 26–27, 114–30, 130–31nn1–4, 131–32nn7–10, 132nn13, 16, 18, 133n24, 134n29
- Thiong’O, Ngugi wa, 229n5
- Thompson, Edward (E.P.), 112n30, 141, 160n13, 223
- Thompson, Judith, 125, 130n2, 131n7, 133n22–23, 134n29
- Thorn, Jennifer, 61, 79n16, 80n41
- Tomiya, Susumu, 250n
- Tooke, Horne, 115
- Townsend, Joseph, 233n31
- Toynbee, Arnold, 223, 235n59
- translatio imperii*, 69
- translatio studii*, 69, 77

- Tresch, John, 195n49
Treviranus, Gottfried Reinhold, 9, 196n68
Tromp, Marlene, 250n9
Turgot, Anne Robert Jacques, 35, 41, 47
- Vernon, James, 203, 229nn4,9, 230n15
Violence, 13, 25, 56, 58–59, 61–62, 66, 73–74, 76, 220; guilt and, 67–68; immunity and, 123; law-founding, 57, 66–67, 73; mythic(al) violence, 57, 61, 67–69, 71–73, 77, 81
visibility, 136–37, 141, 146, 148, 150, 153, 156–57, 159, 164, 168, 249
vitalism, 3, 6, 10, 24, 26–28, 98–99, 101, 105, 114–15, 117–20, 123, 132n9, 134n29, 138–39 152, 160n7, 171, 173–74, 178, 191, 197n79; vital principle, 98–99, 104, 107, 166
von Haller, Albrecht, 8, 98, 168–69, 190n4, 193nn21–24
von Sydow, Momme, 250n9
- Watts, Isaac, 1
Wheatley, John, 68
Wheatley, Phillis, 24–25, 56–62, 67–77,
Wheatley, Susannah, 68
Whytt, Robert, 98, 111n16
Williams, Nicholas, 160n15
Wilson, Richard, 57, 70–73, 75–76
Winch, Donald, 53n32, 110n1, 112n43, 205, 229n13
Wollstonecraft, Mary, 10
Wong, Bin, 232n20
Wordsworth, William, 109, 115
writing, 27, 139, 140–41, 143 146, 148, 150, 159, 203; as bookmaking and body-making, 146, 148
- Young, Robert M., 250n4
- Zabala, Santiago, 250n5
Zammito, John H., 191n6, 193n21, 194n35



Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers, *series editors*

Georges Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life*. Translated by Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg, Introduction by Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers.

Henri Atlan, *Selected Writings: On Self-Organization, Philosophy, Bioethics, and Judaism*. Edited and with an Introduction by Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers.

Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*. Translated by Steven Miller.

François Delaporte, *Chagas Disease: History of a Continent's Scourge*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Foreword by Todd Meyers.

Jonathan Strauss, *Human Remains: Medicine, Death, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Paris*.

Georges Canguilhem, *Writings on Medicine*. Translated and with an Introduction by Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers.

François Delaporte, *Figures of Medicine: Blood, Face Transplants, Parasites*. Translated by Nils F. Schott, Foreword by Christopher Lawrence.

Juan Manuel Garrido, *On Time, Being, and Hunger: Challenging the Traditional Way of Thinking Life*.

Pamela Reynolds, *War in Worcester: Youth and the Apartheid State*.

Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter, eds., *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics, and Neoliberalism*.

Henning Schmidgen, *The Helmholtz Curves: Tracing Lost Time*. Translated by Nils F. Schott.

Henning Schmidgen, *Bruno Latour in Pieces: An Intellectual Biography*. Translated by Gloria Custance.

Veena Das, *Affliction: Health, Disease, Poverty*.

Kathleen Frederickson, *The Ploy of Instinct: Victorian Sciences of Nature and Sexuality in Liberal Governance*.

Roma Chatterji, ed., *Wording the World: Veena Das and Scenes of Inheritance*.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Aurélien Barrau, *What's These Worlds Coming To?*

Translated by Travis Holloway and Flor Méchain. Foreword by David Pettigrew.

Anthony Stavrianakis, Gaymon Bennett, and Lyle Fearnley, eds., *Science, Reason, Modernity: Readings for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*.

Richard Baxstrom and Todd Meyers, *Realizing the Witch: Science, Cinema, and the Mastery of the Invisible*.

Hervé Guibert, *Cytomegalovirus: A Hospitalization Diary*. Introduction by

David Caron, Afterword by Todd Meyers, Translated by Clara Orban.

Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx*.

Fernando Vidal and Francisco Ortega, *Being Brains: Making the Cerebral Subject*.

Mirko D. Grmek, *Pathological Realities: Essays on Disease, Experiments, and History*. Edited, translated, and with an Introduction by Pierre-Olivier Méthot, Foreword by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger.

Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag, eds., *Systems of Life: Biopolitics, Economics, and Literature on the Cusp of Modernity*.